

BRITAIN'S BEST PC GAMES MAG PCZONE.CO.UK

PCZONE

ISSUE 224 OCTOBER 2010

WIN!
TINY COMPO
The Mafia originated in the island of Sicily. Which island gave us a breed of hairless cat?

MAFIA II

Exclusive review! We capo some asses in this period tale of sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll



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Meet The Team

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ADAM GLICK

The Glickenspielenator

AGE Inexpressable in human numbers

LIKES Wafts

DISLIKES Gusts

FANCIES What you're having

FAVOURITE GAME *Zeno Clash*

NOW PLAYING *Mass Effect 2*

Adam's erratic and unpredictable writing style, coupled his mask wearing, has led to worries for his mental health. "It's like even he doesn't know he is," diagnosed our hypothetical doctor. "I'm worried that, should we unlace that wrestling mask, there will be no face underneath. Like in that episode of *Sapphire & Steel*. You know, the one where the guy's got no face." Adam responded by performing a series of back flips so outstanding and hyper-real that the doctor was blown into the '70s.

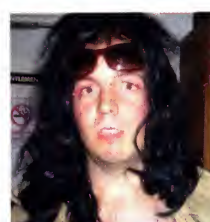


TAM SIN OXFORD

Ass Master

Tamsin has had vast troughs of experience in PC gaming, but most importantly, she can pull off a swear with conviction, gusto, and aplomb.

NOW PLAYING *BioShock*

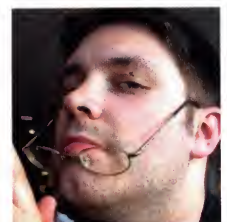


WILL PORTER

Bullet Warden

Mr Porter has been asked by Lancaster magistrates to wear a padlocked leotard after startling one too many hen parties with his impression of an elephant.

NOW PLAYING *Final Fantasy XIV*

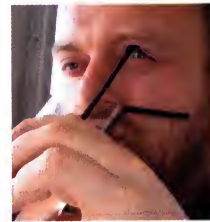


DAVID BROWN

Underpaid, under-appreciated, and under there

David Brown: a name that causes men to emit a terrified quack and flap off to a pond with their young. Hang on, that's foxes and ducks.

NOW PLAYING *FM2010*



JON BLYTH

Docile Love Puppet

Jon Blyth is keeping the freelance spirit alive by working four days a week, and spending the fifth day sobbing over a crayon drawing of the boy who haunts his dreams.

NOW PLAYING *Singularity*



STEVE HILL

Duke of the Freebie

Steve survives by the maxim "you cannot kill that which has been hollowed out by the parade of disappointment life", only he doesn't phrase it like a ponce.

NOW PLAYING *AvP*



NICK BRAKESPEAR

Sir Gobarot

Nick recently came into the office and worked free for a morning, while he was waiting for a train. This caused everyone to mouth "weirdo" at each other.

NOW PLAYING *GTA: Episodes*

WHAT'S HELPED THIS MONTH... Entering a state of "consultation".

WHAT HASN'T HELPED THIS MONTH... A cake, which was devoured before it could give us its message of hope.

WHAT WE'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT...

A PROFOUND, MOROSE SILENCE **5min** Broken by the sobbing of David's grandmother.

HAPPY THOUGHTS **45min** Pain, like all things, is finite.

MOTIONLESSLY SITTING THERE **3min** Until biological necessity forces us to breathe again.

HURRAY FOR EVERYTHING **70min** Well, this downbeat attitude won't fix the ozone layer, will it?

DON'T HOLD IT! **14min** Who're the bigger dicks: people with iPhone 4s, or people lolling at the reception issue?

WHAT A DIFFERENCE A GAY MAKES **40min** Pitching TV shows is easy when you're drunk.

CRACKDOWN 2 **20min** Tried it. Didn't like it. Crawled immediately back upstairs to our PCs.

IDOSING **104min** Well it felt like it. Listening to *Gates of Hades* does that.

THE '50S **52min** The *Mafia II* soundtrack really is damn good.

JOB CENTRES **68min** Hope there's not a recession on, or any kind of adverse economic climate.

WIN!



HOW TO ENTER Text TINY followed by your answer, name and email address to 87474; or send your answer, name, post address and phone number to Tiny Comp, PC ZONE, Future Publishing, 2 Bakewell Street, London, NW1 6HW, or by email to letters@pczone.co.uk (set TINY COMPO as the subject). The winner will be picked at random from all correct entries and will receive a copy of *Grandmaster: The Video Game*. The winner will be notified within 28 days of the closing date. Texts will be charged at 50p plus your normal network tariff. By entering this competition, you consent to us using your personal details to send you information about products and services which may be of interest to you. If you do not want to receive this, include the word "STOP" at the end of your text or postal entry.

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PCZONE

Contents

PHANTASMAGORIA

WELL, THIS IS nice. I get to be the first Acting Associate Editor (ASS) in the history of *PC ZONE*. It's rather nice here, although the chair could do with some more padding and there doesn't seem to be anyone to peel my grapes. Still, I'm ogling a copy of *Mass Effect 2* with a deep and abiding love, and I have read the magazine before any of you. Mwaahahaha. etc.

I can't help feeling incredibly lucky and honoured to join a long list of *PC ZONE* luminaries (Steve Hogarty, Jamie Sefton, Dave Woods, Jeremy Wells, Paul Lakin) who have carried this magazine from its inspired beginnings in April 1993 right up until today. It's not intimidating at all. (I am lying). Still, I get to sit next to Dave and Log, and I've met Adam Glick who's remarkably handsome in real life, in spite of my not being able to see his face.

Next month's issue is going to be a *PCZ* nostalgia-fest of note. We are already huddled around in the dark corners of dingy pubs, plotting every fine detail down the the last nun with a joystick. Will we unearth old treasures? Will we bring back much-loved features? One thing's for sure, your letters and tweets will feature in the magazine. So send us your words, your sorrowful pleas, your misty-eyed trips down memory lane, and we'll publish as many as we possibly can.

Tamsin Oxford

Acting Associate Editor

tamsin.oxford@futurenet.com

64

COVER STORY

MAFIA II

The long-awaited gangster shooter is back. Is it love or just a deep and meaningful friendship?

36

ASSASSIN'S CREED: BROTHERHOOD

Get stab-happy with a bunch of mates, in *Assassin's Creed 3* (well it is, isn't it?)

46 MEDAL OF HONOR

52 DRIVER: SAN FRANCISCO

74 APB

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a SEGA Megadrive!
See page 42





UPFRONT

- 3 MEET THE TEAM
- 6 LETTERS
- 10 COVER STORY
- 14 LEAD NEWS: VICTORIA II
- 16 SPECIAL REPORT
- 18 CHARTS
- 20 LORD OF THE RINGS ONLINE
- 22 INCOMING
- 24 LOG'S COLUMN
- 26 HOT SHOTS: MORTAL KOMBAT
- 28 GUILD WARS 2
- 30 WARHAMMER 40,000: SPACE MARINE
- 32 KANE & LYNCH 2: DOG DAYS
- 36 ASSASSIN'S CREED: BROTHERHOOD
- 40 ROCK OF AGES
- 44 PORTAL 2
- 46 MEDAL OF HONOR
- 48 FINAL FANTASY XIV: ONLINE
- 52 DRIVER: SAN FRANCISCO
- 54 NEED FOR SPEED: HOT PURSUIT
- 56 A BRIEF HISTORY OF... BULLET-TIME

REVIEWS

- 64 MAFIA II
- 70 SINGULARITY
- 74 APB
- 78 TRANSFORMERS: WAR FOR CYBERTRON

- 80 MONKEY ISLAND 2 SPECIAL EDITION
- 81 HEGEMONY: PHILIP OF MACEDON
- 84 LEGO HARRY POTTER: YEARS 1-4
- 86 TOKI TORI
- 87 DARKEST OF DAYS
- 87 A FAREWELL TO DRAGONS
- 88 THE SIMS 3: AMBITIONS
- 89 SNIPER: GHOST RECON
- 90 STATE OF PLAY: COUNTER-STRIKE: SOURCE
- 92 BUDGET
- 94 BUYER'S GUIDE

HARDWARE

- 97 NEWS
- 98 DEAR WANDY
- 100 REVIEWS
- 102 BUYER'S GUIDE

FREEPLAY

- 105 NEWS
- 108 DEMOS
- 110 FREWARE
- 112 EXTEND
- 114 MAP MAKING: LEFT 4 DEAD 2
- 116 ONLINE ZONE

LOOKING BACK

- 118 RETRO ZONE
- 120 BACK IN THE DAY: DEUSEX
- 122 ON THE PCZ HARD DRIVE
- 124 DEVELOPER'S COMMENTARY: MASS EFFECT 2
- 128 NEVERQUEST
- 130 BACK PAGE



WHAT'S ON THE COVER?



64 MAFIA II

Too busy? PC ZONE in 81 words... What have we got for you this month? Well, the first and original space marine gets a game at last, and we check out some old guys as they shoot and stab loads of people. Then we stick a load of gel in our floaty hair and become anorexic in a JRPG, and then drive cars around and get chased by coppers... a lot. Then we check out a bunch of other games and refuse to bow to bitterness or hatred.

110 FREWARE

Go all *R-Type*, run along titans' backs, play with a cow, and jump around to meet your true love.

Letters

Tamsin Oxford dons her leathers and waves her cutlass in the face of piracy



KING OF LETTERS

FRIDGE MAGNET

Over-zealous DRM may kill-off the PC games market. It's certainly stopping me from buying any PC game that uses it. The idea that I might switch off my internet connection (how dare I?), or have it breakdown, and then have no access to my legitimately purchased games, fills me with barely-controlled rage. That blood vessel in my temple is throbbing ominously.

To then find-out that some little shit can download a pirated game, and play as much as they like without an internet connection would push me over the edge.

Here's a novel idea: introduce a security feature that doesn't stop piracy, but can inconvenience paying customers to the point that they consider using pirated software instead. Pure genius!

How about designing me a fridge that punches me in the balls every time I open the door? I love cheese, but you know what? After a few rounds with a pugilistic fridge, I wouldn't bother eating it again, no matter how good it is. There's a metaphor in there... somewhere.

Gavin Hay

Dearest Gavin. This was one of the funniest letters we received this month. As a reward for making me laugh and nod and making an excellent point we shall reward you with a lovely prize. It isn't cheese.



WIN!

If your letter is picked out to become the King (or Queen) of these here pages, you will receive a set of Mionix Keid 20 headphones. They're kitted out a mic, noise reduction capabilities and memory foam earpads.



The sheer volume of letters about piracy led us to dedicate an entire Letters' Page to them all. Some will make you cry, others will make you laugh, some may want you to take out a BFG and shoot someone. Enjoy - Ed

FLIPPING 'ECK

In response to The Flipside (Letters, issue 222), what a fantastically honest little letter.

As gamers we are overindulgent children. We cry when we don't get our own way. Moan if a game is too hard. Whine if the game is too easy, and start

to roll on the floor thumping our hands in a temper tantrum if a

developer dares to give a PC game a multiplatform release.

The joke is we are the architects of our own demise. Rightly, as the letter in your magazine stated, PC ZONE would go down the swanny if we started to download it illegally, and stick it on an e-reader. I can pretty much guarantee that most, if not all, readers of this magazine download music illegally, stream or download movies illegally,

games illegally, books, PDFs, Microsoft Office, key generators... my God, the list goes on. It's a rare person that doesn't do this, but it's the nature of the world we live in.

The games industry is just trying to do what the music industry is starting to do. Make money from what they create. So, when we cry because every company is starting to go down the route of Steam or Ubisoft using permanent connections, who is to really blame? DRM will get more and more strict as time goes by.

As gamers, we don't really care if a studio goes under. We don't care if the staff lose their jobs. We don't care about the multiple agencies, companies, publishers and talent that are lost due to poor sales.

Like I said before, we are children, but like all children if DRM needs to be a strict parent, then so be it. Just as our



Ubisoft's anti-piracy plan #43.



"How about designing me a fridge that punches me in the balls every time I open the door?"

aim is to select, buy and play a game, it is the game industry's aim to create, advertise and sell it.

Steven Best

STUPID CHOICES

I read your article about DRM in the July issue and I find it hard to pick a side. PC gamers should never be punished for buying an original game, but I do understand the need of publishers to use copy protection.

The problem is that it's a vicious circle. Take *Modern Warfare 2* for instance. I didn't download it because I had no money, I downloaded it because Infinity Ward removed dedicated servers on the PC version of the game. Downloading the game was more of a revenge act than anything else.

I say reward honest game buyers and don't punish them, put something extra in the retail version like most Collectors Editions do. Add some items in the bought version you can only attain if you have a legal copy. It could even be something needed to finish the game – as long as people don't notice that would be a great DRM.

But don't force us to have an internet connection 24/7 to play an offline game. It's just plain stupid.

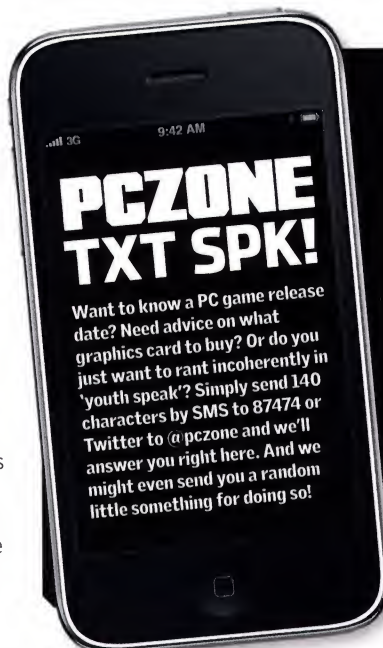
Ariëlla

BONGO DRUMS

How much longer are you going to be banging the anti-DRM drum? Forcing us

to read awkward and inept opinions about a subject matter that everybody in the industry refuses to tackle?

I refer to an article by your Freelancer Jon 'Log' Blyth in issue 220 who – having managed to find the correct forlorn expression to suit the woeful article he was writing – managed to not only ruin his journalistic credibility by avoiding the subject with an, "Oh it confuses me and I hate being confused! So, I won't form a solid opinion", but also what could have been the kick start



Today is my last day doing *PC ZONE* magazine. I hope you all liked it.
Steve Hogarty

Good riddance to bad rubbish we say. (And yes, he did text us to say he was leaving. Git)

GOOD LUCK STEVE! *PC ZONE* won't be the same...:(
Archy Bold

Of course it bloody well will. The nerve...

If games are too complicated for most girls then I must be one of the super brain ones :D
Lauren Wainwright

We doubt that. Super brain [sic] don't use smiles as punctuation.

YOUR SHOUT!
SEND US YOUR REVIEWS
WIN A FREE GAME!

QUAKE II

Jordan Higgins

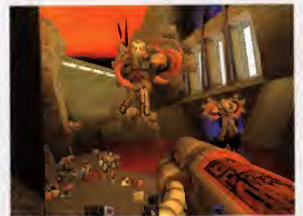
PC ZONE SCORE 97%

You chaps are always putting new games in this section so I thought it would be brilliant if I sent in a review of an old one instead.

This game verges on perfection. Made in 1997, it's just one of those games you always look back on with fondness and love, and have to re-install every now and then.

The graphics, for the time, were amazing, even now they aren't that bad. The story is alright, but the main aspect is the multiplayer – fast, fun, and frags! Me and a few friends still get together just to play this. It's a timeless classic that I will enjoy for years to come. Much love for *Quake II*!

YOUR SHOUT 95%



Send your reviews with a maximum of 120 words, your name and a score to letters@pczone.co.uk. Every one printed here wins a top PC game.



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Ageing assassin
method #7.

to an absolutely grand debate that had the potential to tackle the issues that surround the entire gaming industry and the piracy it faces."

I refer to a letter to by a game developer Lee (The Flipside, *Letters* issue 222). I can say with honesty and integrity that I have never pirated a videogame. But I understand why people do. Mr Lee goes on to tell us about the economic downturn and how it has affected the gaming industry. So, pretty much the same as every other industry then? I ask you Mr Lee, what about the household in this economic climate? Has this not suffered a blow?

"I ask you, Mr Lee, what about the household in this economic climate? Has this not suffered a blow?"

I honestly cannot fathom a way to fix internet piracy. Is it even fixable in this day and age of digital distribution? I doubt it, very much so. So why are we not trying to either learn from it or work with it instead? Am I missing the point? Please tell me. You cannot possibly fix something if you're focusing on the only part that isn't entirely broken.

Maria Jane Leesun

While I agree that the ultimate solution to the problem remains unfound, I disagree that Jon damaged his journalistic integrity.

The lack of transparency from all sides (yes, this means you publishers) means that there is no way to assess the situation fully. Guesses and opinions abound, but accurate figures and facts are in short supply.

I AM GAMER

I'm a gamer who buys games and I also download games. The ratio of games I download versus games I buy is about 35% downloaded and 65% bought. When it came to buying *Assassins Creed 2*, my friends said a lot of people who had already bought it wished they hadn't due to the DRM system.

So, I cancelled my order from Amazon and downloaded the game instead. I had also pre-ordered *Splinter Cell: Conviction* and, yet again, I had my friends telling me about the DRM. However, this time I wanted to play the game online and so I bought it.

After installing the game I found I couldn't even play it due to not being



LOST IN THE POST

LETTERS FROM OUR
DECADE-OLD MAILBAG,
ANSWERED TODAY

FLOPPY DAYS

Your magazine publications often include program disks, but they are always 3.5in. I, like many disk users, have 5.25in machines. Do you provide 5.25in cover disks or can I exchange my 3.5in disks?

JA Dickinson, Posbeer, Ipswich

We can certainly help you with that Mr Dickinson. Right now we have a work experience slave copying the contents of this issue's cover disc onto 5.25in disks for you.

Your 8,022 floppies disks will be in the post to you any month now.



Remember these?

AROUND THE WORLD

We want photos of you with PC ZONE in the most exotic or inappropriate locations. Candid celeb shots count double. Every one printed wins a prize!

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COVER STORY


MAFIA II



EIGHT YEARS HAVE passed since the first *Mafia*, during which time numerous pretenders have tried and failed to bridge the gap. *Made Man* was rubbish. The *Godfather* games were barely better. *Gangsters*, that was OK, but it came out before *Mafia*. Now it's time to give the Mob game back to the masters. Over the years since *Mafia II* was announced we've been exposed to some strange claims. We've been told we'd able to follow members of the public around their daily lives, and individual lights in buildings would have their own routines. All that might has faded away, but the 50 *Playboy* covers remain. Will *Mafia II* fulfil the unfair expectations it's built up?

PAGE

64



"Vito, what does Alan
Titchmarsh say is
good for this soil?"





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UPFRONT

Everything that matters in the **world of PC gaming**

JOYS OF NEWS

Jon 'Log' Blyth

T News is the most valuable use of communication technology. News is best administered in the form of a massive, greasy pill that slips down your neck and slowly releases facts over the course of the day. News is a pelican – a proud, fish-snaffling bird of the sea – and when she opens her mouth, you would do well to sift through the minnows in her briny throat pouch.

News is a loving husband, who comes home late at night drunk on recent events and deserves to be given his dinner, only in this case, dinner is not food but an audience of millions for his impartial commentary on current affairs. If you cannot give him that, then perhaps you are a bad wife to the news. Because news is also a giraffe, whose lofty position allows it to snaffle the most factual leaves from the global tree. It can also peek over fences and blog about what is happening next door.

News is simply the loftiest ambition open to the human spirit. It is the tradition of the dogged investigation, laboriously reading press releases, and slipping the word "bum" into a couple of sentences to lend it a distinctive house style.

Unless it's news about videogames, in which case it's a bunch of frivolous shit about stuff that doesn't really matter. And even if it does matter, you've probably already read it on the internet.

With that in mind, mount your sturdy warhorse, and let us lock horse-horns... with the news!



GRAND OLD TIME

Paradox attempts to conquer the globe

DEVELOPER Paradox PUBLISHER Paradox WEBSITE paradoxplaza.com/games/victoria-ii ETA Winter 2010

THE PEOPLE FROM Paradox are always cheerful, kindly, sociable sorts, who realise the limitations of their chosen titles like few other publishers are capable of doing. So when you do get to see how *Victoria II* is coming along, you're predisposed to not sneer and say "But where's the cover system?" You accept their games for what they are: incredibly detailed strategy games for a specific audience, written and coded by people who believe in their work.

Victoria II – a sequel to *Victoria*, obvious fact fans – should be looked at through the same sceptical goggles as with any grand strategy game, but there's no denying the enthusiasm

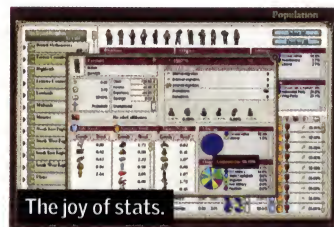
behind it. Starting off in 1836, the game attempts to span 100 years of modern history, from the era of the Corn Laws and Robert Peel right through to the time that Austrian guy tried tricking a British prime minister with fraudulent bits of fluttering white paper.

This is a period when parts of the world are still waiting to be won, such as Africa and the more remote areas of Canada, Australia and South America, but it's also the beginning of the era we see as shaping what we have now.

Just like any Paradox grand strategy game, there are plenty of stats. Silly amounts, in fact, with more pie charts than even a professional eating champion could stomach. Ledgers? You

got it, baby. Breakdowns of how much water each population segment of East Lothian is drinking? You've come to the right place.

Paradox stress that this information is valuable only to those who want it to be. You can just as easily ignore the discontent of the Irish Catholics and automate the removal of their potatoes.



The joy of stats.

STOP PRESS!

DUD NO MORE

It's happened. *FIFA 2011* will be coming to the PC and it will be just like the Xbox and PlayStation 3 versions. About bloody time we say.

BROWSER BASE

Louis Castle, founder of Westwood Studios, believes games like *Call of Duty: Black Ops* could be played through a web browser within a year. Madness?

MONEY WORRIES

Want the special edition set of *Crysis 2*? Well, it might well cost you £130, coming with a nano-suit back pack and 176-page art book, plus more guff.



30

SPACE MARINE

Warhammer 40k goes all shooty! About bloody time...

48

FINAL FANTASY XIV

The big MMO for spikey-haired androgynous youths is coming...



56

A BRIEF HISTORY...

All of the classic bits of bullet-time in one feature. See how we love you?



"Paradox say they've made things much easier for the new player"

Tutorials, gotta love 'em.

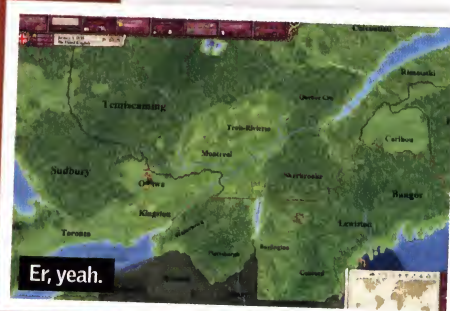
Victoria II will use the same engine as *Hearts of Iron III* and *Europa Universalis III*, but as you'd expect, the words "heavily modified" come into play. New tutorials, a new map and new game dynamics are aimed at making this the most accessible strategy title Paradox have ever made, without compromising their core hardcore-ness.

As is so often the key for a game like this, breaking that initial "So what

the bleeding hell do I do now?" barrier is of paramount importance, and although there are no voices for the tutorial, leading to worries about walls of impenetrable text, Paradox say they've made things much easier for the new player.

Whether that's true or not, well, only time will tell. It's certainly very easy to dismiss this type of game, just as those might say "*Football Manager*, eh? Just a load of numbers and blobs running around on a green screen," but the faithful know just how wrong this viewpoint is. So it is with Paradox fans and when it clicks, when you go "Ah, right, so that's how it works," then you'll never put one down.

A fellow journalist who was viewing the game said his brother had left him playing *Europa Universalis* at midday on a Friday, returning on a Sunday night to find him still there playing. Will that be you with *Victoria II*? **PC!**



Er, yeah.

STUFF

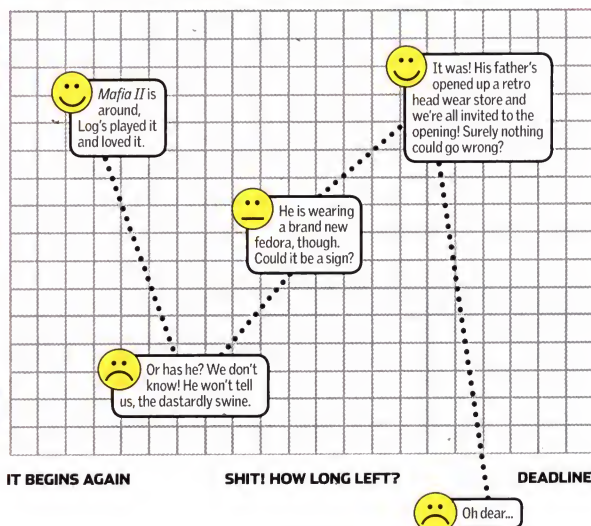
You might have noticed that *Team Fortress 2* has got itself a new Engineer update, and what a monstrous buggler it is too. The biggest update of all time for the game, certainly. The key element is Engineers can now move their constructs around the map, providing more tactical placement and a shifting battle line, instead of horrendous choke points in the same places during every match time. There's also a radioactive nail gun for tagging enemy spies and EMP grenade to enrage your engineering foes.

LIFE IS A ROLLER COASTER

GOOD TIMES

ON THE FENCE

BAD TIMES



Prussia's got horny talent.

CHANNEL HOPPERS

Pavel Barter finds out why TV stations are moving into games

CHUCK A BIT of development money at a *Flash* game and you usually end up with an expensive turd. Free and quick to play, but still a turd. Not in the case of *Bow Street Runner*, though.

Set in 1750s London, this online game had you interrogating prostitutes and roughing up n'er-do-wells like *Grand Theft Auto: Georgian London*. Great acting and historic detail set it apart from most point-and-click adventures, as did the ability to rifle through the stomachs of murder victims for evidence. In 2008, *Bow Street Runner* won a BAFTA. Not bad for a game designed to promote a TV series: Channel 4's *City of Vice*.

GAMES TV

Alice Taylor, Commissioning Editor for Education at Channel 4, says the game deserves to be appreciated on its own merits. "A lot of people were like, 'That's TV support'. It's not TV support, it's a beautifully crafted game. *City of Vice*, a show about the origins of the police force, had already been made. We quickly thought, we'd love to make a game around that same subject..."

The success of *Bow Street Runner* (bit.ly/bowstreetrunner) heralds the UK TV industry's growing interest in games. Experience has taught us that developers usually get it wrong when it comes to games based on TV shows. *The Simpsons*, *South Park*, *Family Guy*, *Little Britain*, *Lost*, *The Sopranos*, *Prison Break*, *24*, need we go on? The list of great TV shows bastardised by awful games is endless. But using a lower cost,



Misfits: painfully trendy.

online template, and gearing their games toward the attention-deficit casual audience, TV channels are increasingly getting it right.

The games are becoming more stylish. Channel 4's battle sim *1066*, for example, displays its 2D war zone in silhouette form, while the map is in 3D, and the boardroom execs are less fuddy-duddy. Earlier this year, BBC Worldwide appointed a former EA honcho, Robert Nashak as executive vice-president of digital entertainment. Also, loads of TV writers are themselves gamers. Look no further than *Father Ted* and *IT Crowd* creator, Graham Linehan, or professional grump and *PC ZONE* alumni, Charlie Brooker.

"Fundamentally, TV channels are interested in audiences and people," says Taylor, who previously worked as BBC Worldwide's Vice-President of Digital Content. "They're evolving. You are finding yourself at a fork in the road that says, 'Do I want to be a TV channel or do I want to be a media content provider or media entertainment?'"

"Do I want to look at what my audiences are doing, and give them what I want, or do I just want to stick to this one thing? Once people just



Doctor Who now appears in free games.



Lost: *Via Domus*. Worst TV adaptation ever?

watched TV, now they do a zillion things. What were once just TV broadcasters have now had to become media corporations."

In order to capture the attention of the masses, TV shows need to be everywhere at once. E4's *Misfits* incorporated Twitter and Facebook accounts for its characters, as well as an online game.

"We knew the series would attract a young, savvy audience and a *Flash* game was the perfect way to recruit fans before they'd even heard of the show," says Jody Smith, Cross Platform Commissioner (Entertainment &

Drama), Channel 4. "From playing the game, the audience were introduced to the characters and premise for the first time. It's not just about marketing, games can be great storytelling devices." British TV channels aren't new to gaming space. The BBC, after all, commissioned one of the first home computers, the BBC Micro, in 1981. But now they're realising that games can stem the flow of diminishing audiences. Channels are tapping mainstream talent to ensure their games aren't hopeless. Charles Cecil, creator of the *Broken Sword* series, helped create the recent *Doctor Who* games, working closely



"A lot of people were like, 'That's TV support'. It's not, it's a beautifully crafted game."

Alice Taylor, Channel 4



"Expect lots more convergence between TV and games"

with the show's production team and actors, while Channel 4's *303 Squadron* and *Trafalgar Origins* were developed alongside TV shows.

"It's vital that the game feels part of the complete package," says Smith. "It should always have the same style and tone of the series, so involving the production companies, writers, and often the talent, is very important. Without their creative input, you could end up with a game that doesn't gel with the show at all."

Now channels are going further, making games part of a show's format. On *The Million Pound Drop*, a new Channel 4 game show hosted by Davina McCall, you can play along in real time. "Viewers often watch TV with

a computer on their lap and we wanted to create something that enhances that two-screen experience, beyond just talking about the show," says Smith.

"Everyone's watched a quiz show and shouted answers at the screen at some point, so we thought we'd let the viewer put their virtual money where their mouth is and create a game where they can play along at the same time as the TV contestants.

TALE OF TWO MEDIA

"We also fed real-time data from the game back into the show, so as the contestant progressed through the show, Davina could reference how players at home were doing. It brought viewers closer to a programme than ever before and the results were outstanding. Almost 5% of the audience played along live, with 3.5 million games played over the course of the week."

For anyone reared on a diet of big-budget shooters, this stuff might seem alien, but the crossover bodes well for developers and games in general. Last year, Channel 4 pledged an investment of £4.5m in UK indies, including Beatnik

THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX

Reach for the off switch with these dismal TV tie-ins

GRANGE HILL (1987)

For anyone over a certain age *Grange Hill* was as important a part of growing up as slamming doors, playing music too loud, and going out and getting pregnant. The show could be preachier than the Pope, though. This game's description of an encounter with a drug dealer being a case in point, "There is an empty look in his eye as he snatches the money from your hand. His face is pale and drawn, his body thin and unfed. He steals to keep his habit and makes addicts of children. He is dead, and soon you will be too." Holy crap!



NEIGHBOURS (1991)

Everybody needs good neighbours, but this tripe is like living next door to Fred West. You play mulleted Scott Robinson, bouncing around Ramsey Street on his skateboard, although it's more *Paperboy* than *Tony Hawk*. Jason Donovan, who played Scott, found greater gaming glory in later years when he voiced the quiz show host in Sony's *Buzz!* for

the PlayStation. This game, however, failed to win any points for being a rubbish accompaniment to a rubbish soap opera.

LITTLE BRITAIN (2007)

So not funny. That's *Little Britain: The Computer Game*, a travesty that saps the remaining giggles from the catchphrase friendly show, reducing it to a series of infuriating mini-games. We get Vicki Pollard roller-skating across a park, travelling a straight line and collecting CDs. Andy dives off a board while Lou isn't looking, and Marjorie Dawes runs around a supermarket in a blatant rip-off of *Pac-Man*. Computer says no.



PRISON BREAK: THE CONSPIRACY (2010)

Unless you enjoy male bonding and bad food, prison isn't an exciting place. In fact, you'd rather not be there at all. This sentiment is strongly felt by anyone who has done time with *Prison Break*, the game. The stealth missions are impossible, thanks to guards who can see through walls, yet look through you when



up close, button-punching weight lifting games, and fist fights that feel like repeatedly punching a haddock in the gills.

Games and Zombie Cow Studios. For the station, this makes perfect sense, all of Channel 4's TV output is produced by independent companies, so why not invest in indie developers? Likewise, the BBC's broad remit is to reach audiences through public service content, hence its involvement in games.

In the future, we may see channels rummaging their back catalogues, resurrecting old brands for games. Maybe a *Brookside* game? ("I doubt it," says Taylor.) But although we might never get to bury Anna Friel's nasty dad

under the patio, expect lots more convergence between TV and games. For TV producers, executives, actors and directors, games like *Bow Street Runner* proved you can reach out to a wider audience with the internet.

"I think there will be a lot more televisual games," says Taylor.

"Someone said to me, recently, 'It's like the CD-ROM stuff from 15 years ago has come round again'.

There was nothing to say to that other than, 'Yeah'. It didn't work last time, but this time it's working." **PCZ**

Is there anything you want **PC ZONE** to investigate? (Warning: some jobs might be considered too big or too small...)

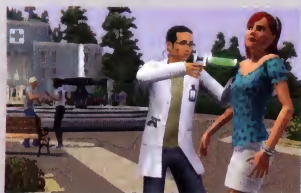
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2 Balcombe St, London, NW1 6NW

PCZONE Charts

Official data compiled by GfK ChartTrack

- 1 **THE SIMS 3: AMBITIONS**
Issue 224 - 60%
- 2 **THE SIMS 3**
Issue 208 - 92%
- 3 **NEW SNIPER: GHOST WARRIOR**
Issue 224 - 65%
- 4 **BATTLEFIELD: BAD COMPANY 2**
Issue 220 - 84%
- 5 **NEW APB**
Issue 224 - 63%
- 6 **THE SIMS 3: WORLD ADVENTURES**
Issue 215 - 78%
- 7 **WORLD OF WARCRAFT: WRATH OF LICH KING**
Issue 202 - 86%
- 8 **COMMAND & CONQUER 4: TIBERIAN TWILIGHT**
Issue 220 - 60%
- 9 **NEW ARMA II: OPERATION ARROWHEAD**
Issue 223 - 69%
- 10 **MODERN WARFARE 2**
Issue 215 - 95%
- 11 **EMPIRE: TOTAL WAR**
Issue 206 - 78%
- 12 **MASS EFFECT 2**
Issue 218 - 93%
- 13 **RE THE SETTLERS 7: PATHS TO A KINGDOM**
Issue 220 - 74%
- 14 **ASSASSIN'S CREED II**
Issue 219 - 90%
- 15 **NEW DISCIPLES III: RENAISSANCE**
Issue 223 - 71%
- 16 **DAWN OF WAR II: CHAOS RISING**
Issue 220 - 90%
- 17 **NEW PRO CYCLING MANAGER 2010: TOUR DE FRANCE**
N/A
- 18 **THE WITCHER: ENHANCED EDITION PLATINUM**
N/A
- 19 **GTA: EPISODES FROM LIBERTY CITY**
Issue 221 - 86%
- 20 **NEW BUS SIMULATOR 2**
N/A



1. THE SIMS 3: AMBITIONS
Follow your sims at work. It's like having a proper job that you have to pay EA for the privilege of being given.



5. APB
Looks like some crook stole the game out of APB before it was released. Might be worth revisiting in time.



3. SNIPER: GHOST WARRIOR
This rather poor game isn't cunningly titled to trick people into thinking it's a new *Ghost Recon*, honestly.



20. BUS SIMULATOR 2
This game is charting? Seriously? I tell you, you lot don't deserve a proper PC gaming magazine.

CRASHED OUT

Not the sequel to that mucky film

WEBSITE punchers-impact.com

WHAT DO YOU call a Multiplayer Online Battle Racing Arena with role-playing aspects? MOBRARPA? Nah, that sounds like a Japanese monster that could beat up Godzilla.

Instead, we'll just call it *Crasher*, a game where teams of five drivers take each other on and work together to develop their vehicles into high-speed tools of death.

That's not to say that *Crasher* is a free-for-all – teamwork is important. This is where that unexpected RPG element comes in – team members will be able to take on different roles, depending on how they've developed their vehicle.

You could start with a defensive, shielded tanker, or go for stunts and manoeuvrability with the physically weaker bike. Whatever you choose, you'll build an offensive arsenal as you progress along skill trees of your "class".



With strategic teamwork and intense action (games are expected to last around 15 minutes), *Crasher* aims to work as a game and a spectator-based e-sport. To be fair, if anything's going to appeal the mainstream in ways that a Zerg Rush doesn't, it's loads of cars blowing each other up.

Fact burst finale – *Crasher* is made by Punchers Impact (if that sounds like an odd name, they're French), and will be an exclusive PC release. Punchers Impact plans to have *Crasher* available to download at the end of the year.



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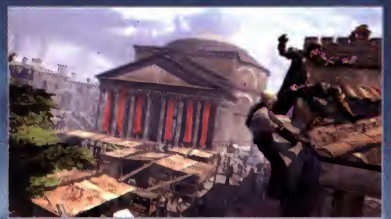
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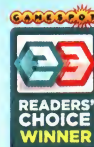
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UBISOFT

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JOYSTICK 'EM UP

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WEBSITE goldenjoystick.com

WITH EVERY GOLDEN Joysticks awards comes the same all-important question – will this be another nail in the imaginary coffin of PC gaming?

What we do know is that more than 400,000 votes have been cast so far. But having 1/400,000th of the result is too much influence, so if you haven't yet paid a visit to goldenjoystick.com go there now, and make everyone else matter that little bit less.

The PC no longer has its own category, so here's our suggestions to convince an industry that we're the plucky can-do platform who'll never say die.

Let's get *Napoleon: Total War* in for Strategy Game Of The Year, and *Batman: Arkham*

Asylum up there for Action/Adventure Game Of The Year. *Assassin's Creed II* was good, but it was difficult to pirate, so eff that. Meanwhile, if *World Of Goo* doesn't get Puzzle Game Of The Year then it just goes to show what a bunch of pricks the public really are.

As for Ultimate Game Of The Year? Let's have it, *Mass Effect 2*. BioWare did a great job of making it work uniquely well on the PC, and if you can't give primary coloured space tits an award, there's something wrong with the universe.

Voting's open until the middle of October, with the winners announced at an overpriced ceremony that you can't afford to attend a few days later. Hell, we're not even invited ourselves, they're too busy screwing cash out of companies. To see the full shortlists and vote visit goldenjoystick.com. Viva oligarchy!

Make this blob happy: vote for *Goo!*

How could this not win?

HEAVY FOOTWEAR

Senior *APB* artist shakes head and tuts at shoe clothing

WEBSITE apb.com

THE SENIOR ARTIST on Realtime Worlds' *APB*, Jack Oakmann, spoke out recently on the subject of character customisation, one of the few special bits of the company's troubled MMO (reviewed on page 74).

Talking at the Develop Conference in Brighton, he launched an astonishing tirade at players who might want to make "a shirt made of shoes," saying there was no way that his company could possibly sanction such unconventional attire.

He also firmly put down a question about drivable go-karts and whether they might be allowed in the future, citing the fact that the game's tech had

to have some kind of limit or the balance of the universe may be upset.

Elsewhere, Double Fine's Tim Schafer discussed how difficult it was for those in the games industry to comment on the 'proper' length of a game, because he thought journalists, devs and so on, due to their limited time to spend with games, were only able to devote small bits of time to each game, because so many needed to be played.

Compare this to a regular gamer, who has far less games calling out to him, and the issue of a game being short or too long is approached so differently. He didn't have anything to say about the concept of shoe shirts, though.



**KATE PAIZ**

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER, LORD OF THE RINGS ONLINE

FREEDOM FOR MIDDLE-EARTH

Chris Capel asks Turbine what its got in its pocket

AFTER THREE YEARS, countless updates and two major expansions, Turbine's *Lord of the Rings Online* is going free-to-play this autumn.

The company's flagging *Dungeons & Dragons Online* underwent a massive revival when it became the first major MMO to switch to free-to-play from a subscription model, but *LOTRO* has been consistently popular since it launched in 2007. Why go free if you don't need to?

We got *LOTRO*'s executive producer Kate Paiz to answer this tricky riddle...

Q What prompted your decision to go free with *LOTRO* now?

A The success of *DDO* is undeniable and the increasing acceptance of the free-to-play model meant that this was the right time to make the change for *The Lord of the Rings Online*.

LOTRO has been doing very well as a subscription-based game but we felt that our hybrid model could really grow the game by providing more choices to the players.

How successful has *DDO* been since it went free-to-play?

Incredibly. Players have really embraced *DDO* and we have increased our player base substantially. It's currently the third-most played MMO in north America and is growing every day.

What makes free-to-play better for you than regular payments?

The number one reason people don't play an MMO is that they must pay



Soon you won't have to pay to be an elf lord.

a monthly subscription. Having the MMO run as a free-to-play game reduces barriers to entry which means it is attractive to a much broader range of gamers by providing players with a choice in how they play and pay for the game.

LOTRO is one of the world's leading MMOs with incredible depth and quality that is rarely found in free games. By offering a free-to-play option, more players will be able to discover how much fun *LOTRO* is and to join the great community of players we have.

Will players who bought a six-month subscription a few weeks before the game goes free-to-play get a refund, or, at least, some kind of warning before buying?

Players with existing subscriptions will automatically convert to VIPs. This offers access to all game content and features – outside of those from expansions – so long as they remain active. VIP players also receive exclusive benefits like priority access to servers,

to-play, and a long, exciting future with regular content updates, new features, increased depth and new adventures for people to enjoy.

After you made your announcement, Blizzard mentioned the possibility

"We expect to see a huge boost to our player base following the launch of free-to-play"

five character slots per server, a 20-slot wardrobe for cosmetic items, full customer service, and much more.

What does this all mean for the future of *LOTRO*?

This means the future is very bright. We expect to see a huge boost to our player base following the launch of free-

that *World of Warcraft* would get a free-to-play option in the future. Do you think all paid-for MMOs will follow the model you've created in the future?

The industry has certainly been paying attention to our success with our new offering and we feel it represents the future of online entertainment. **PCZ**



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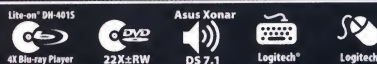
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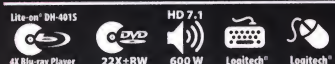
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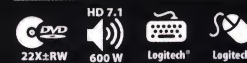
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Incoming

How you'll be wasting your money in 2010

OVER THE NEXT 12 months there are many great games promised to us by many great developers. This month alone sees the return of Messers Kane and Lynch in what could be the rarest of things, a sequel that's better than the original, as well as Mafia II (which gets reviewed on page 64).

There are more wonderful games to come from those purveyors of MMO crystal meth Blizzard, the all-conquering EA, and those distrusting gits at Ubisoft, and we've listed them all here for your pleasure. As usual, we've had to balance the nerve-tingling excitement of games like *Kane & Lynch 2* with the worrisome *Ride to Hell* so you don't come over all faint.

DEAD RISING 2

For some reason, everyone loves zombies. They've become nearly as cuddly and popular as vampires. (We expect a new Hannah Montana film seeing her copping off with an animated rotting corpse any day now.) But in our eyes the only good zombie is a headshot zombie. The next best is a violent, well-armed zombie who has loads of mates.

Dead Rising 2 has loads of these zombies, dropped into a semi-satirical story critiquing reality TV and gambling. But you don't care if *Dead Rising 2*

has a veneer of social conscience, all you need to know is it'll let you stick a fan on your head so you can run around a room decapitating zombies.



METAL GEAR SOLID: RISING

While we PC gamers have had Sam Fisher for our stealth gaming needs, console players have made do with lengthy cut-scenes that are broken with snatches of stealth-action gameplay starring an old guy who likes to wear a cardboard box or some jumped up kid with spiky hair.

The star of *Rising* is this said kid: Raiden (star of *MGS2: Sons of Liberty*). In a radical departure for the series, Raiden doesn't sneak around – he has a nifty sword-like thing to swing around and cut

people into pieces with. Yet this is still unlikely to make PC gamers moist about *Rising*, no matter how gorgeous it's looking like it'll be.



GAME	PUBLISHER	ETA
KANE & LYNCH 2: DOG DAYS	EIDOS	20 AUG
MAFIA II	2K GAMES	27 AUG
SHIP SIMULATOR 2010: EXTREMES	PARADOX	27 AUG
SPELLFORCE 2: FAITH IN DESTINY	JOWOOD	27 AUG
THE PATRICIAN IV	KALYPSO MEDIA	27 AUG
AMNESIA: THE DARK DESCENT	FRACTIONAL	AUGUST
DEAD RISING 2	CAPCOM	3 SEPT
R.U.S.E.	UBISOFT	3 SEPT
WORLD OF WARCRAFT: CATAclysm	ACTIVISION	3 SEPT
FRONT MISSION EVOLVED	SQUARE ENIX	17 SEPT
TWO WORLDS II	ZUXXEZ	17 SEPT
TRUE CRIME	ACTIVISION	21 SEPT
METAL GEAR SOLID: RISING	KONAMI	23 SEPT
ARCANIA: GOTHIC 4	JOWOOD	24 SEPT
CIVILIZATION V	2K GAMES	24 SEPT
F1 2010	CODEMASTERS	24 SEPT
LOST PLANET 2	CAPCOM	24 SEPT
RIDE TO HELL	DEEP SILVER	24 SEPT
TEST DRIVE UNLIMITED 2	NAMCO BANDAI	24 SEPT
FINAL FANTASY XIV: ONLINE	SQUARE ENIX	30 SEPT
GHOST RECON: FUTURE SOLDIER	UBISOFT	1 OCT
MAX PAYNE 3	ROCKSTAR	1 OCT

AHEAD OF THE GAME

Take heed readers – this is how excited we are over the biggest games that are coming out of the next 12 months.



MEDAL OF HONOR	EA	15 OCT
STAR WARS: FORCE UNLEASHED 2	LUCASARTS	26 OCT
THIEF 4	EIDOS	28 OCT
FALLOUT: NEW VEGAS	BETHESDA	29 OCT
CRYSIS 2	EA	AUTUMN 2010
FABLE III	MICROSOFT	AUTUMN 2010
F.E.A.R. 3	WARNER	AUTUMN 2010
DC UNIVERSE ONLINE	SONY ONLINE	1 NOV
STORM OF WAR	UBISOFT	1 NOV
TRON: EVOLUTION	DISNEY	1 NOV
CALL OF DUTY: BLACK OPS	ACTIVISION	9 NOV
RAGE	BETHESDA	12 NOV
ASSASSIN'S CREED: BROTHERHOOD	UBISOFT	16 NOV
NEED FOR SPEED: HOT PURSUIT	EA	16 NOV
HARRY POTTER AND THE DEATHLY HALLOWS NAILED	EA	19 NOV
BATTLEFIELD: BAD COMPANY 2 - VIETNAM	EA	29 NOV
HITMAN 5	SQUARE ENIX	WINTER 2010
STARCRAFT II: HEART OF THE SWARM	BLIZZARD	WINTER 2010
STARCRAFT II: LEGACY OF THE VOICE	BLIZZARD	WINTER 2010
THE AGENCY: COVERT OPS	SOE	TBA 2010
ALIENS: COLONIAL MARINES	SEGA	TBA 2010
CARRIER COMMAND: GAEA MISSION	BOHEMIA	TBA 2010
SPEC OPS: THE LINE	2K GAMES	TBA 2010
BRINK	BETHESDA	EARLY 2011
BULLETSTORM	EA	EARLY 2011
DEAD SPACE 2	EA	EARLY 2011
DRIVER: SAN FRANCISCO	UBISOFT	EARLY 2011
THE SECRET WORLD	FUNCOM	EARLY 2011
BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM 2	WARNER BROS	SPRING 2011
DEUS EX: HUMAN REVOLUTION	EIDOS	SPRING 2011
HOMEFRONT	THQ	SPRING 2011

TRON: EVOLUTION

Tron holds a special place in the hearts of every 30-something gamer. And an even more special place in the heart of game developers, who've treated the

original film with a tremendous amount of respect, culminating in *Tron 2.0* – a brilliant game and a sequel of sorts to the movie. Now we're waiting with impatiently held breaths for *Tron: Legacy*, the real movie sequel. It has the right ingredients – lightcycles, discs, and Jeff Bridges – to make it a properly fine sequel. Whether *Tron: Evolution* – the movie's inevitable tie-in game – will be as good, we don't know. But it'll have the lovely Olivia Wilde in it, which makes us all kind of happy.



XCOM

However much you love an old game, people have to understand that gaming fashions move on. In these days turn-based tactical combat has no place in

gaming, outside of the bizarre world of JRPGs. Hence *XCOM* – the revamp of the classic *X-Com* series – has been turned into an FPS.

Fans of the original have ranted about this change. So did we. But then we saw the teaser film and oh my, did it quieten us. Mainly through sheer terror at that monolith thing, and the prospect of facing down aliens armed with death rats with nothing but shotguns and trilbies. This isn't the *X-Com* of our youth, but it's looking mighty fine.



LORD OF THE RINGS: WAR IN THE NORTH	DISNEY	SPRING 2011
RED FACTION: ARMAGEDDON	THQ	SPRING 2011
SHOGUN 2: TOTAL WAR	SEGA	SPRING 2011
THIEF 4		SPRING 2011
THE WITCHER 2: ASSASSINS OF KINGS	NAMCO BANDAI	SPRING 2011
LEGO STAR WARS 3	LUCASARTS	WINTER 2011
PORTAL 2	VALVE	WINTER 2011
STAR WARS: THE OLD REPUBLIC	LUCASARTS	WINTER 2011
XCOM	2K GAMES	WINTER 2011
DIABLO III	ACTIVISION	TBA 2011
WARHAMMER 40,000: SPACE MARINE	THQ	TBA 2011
WARHAMMER 40,000: THE DARK MILLENNIUM	THQ	TBA 2012



JON 'LOG' BLYTH...

DOING THE BIG

REVIEW

If you want to enter into a debate with this professional opinion stater, you can contact Log by the methods below.

@ letters@pczone.co.uk

✉ Mr Log, PC ZONE, 2 Balcombe St, London, NW1 6NW

Writing a preview can be tough. Not tough in any way which I expect sympathy for, of course. I'm aware other people have far less appealing jobs, where they have to inhale huge bags of asbestos before getting their ankles broken by a man in a cowl. But still, tough in the privileged spectrum of the fat pampered douche whose experience of suffering is limited to a perforated eardrum.

Why tough? Well, the very act of covering a game in a magazine means that you're bringing it to someone's attention. This implies that the game is attention worthy. So, it's just not on to tell what's sometimes the truth – that you couldn't give a vestigial tit about the game.

Dutifully, you imagine what other people might like about the game. This involves looking in the mirror and saying, "good graphics, doo-woo-woo!", and the whole process inevitably ends with idiot writing like, "if you liked X, you'll also like Y", and muted negativity, "it won't change the world but it promises to be a momentary diversion."

This is the reason you'll never find me writing about *The Sims*. I tried it once and all that came out were vowels. It needs to be written by someone who cares.

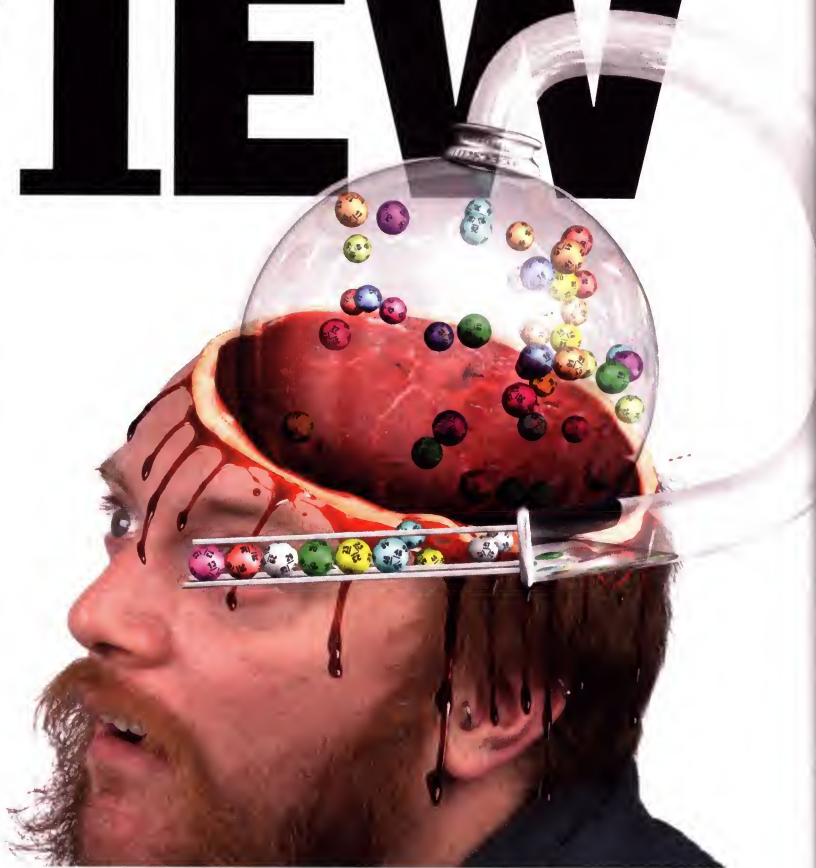
ADOLESCENT AMBITIONS

So, reviewing is where it's at for me. Playing games for ages and then saying exactly what you think about them, for good and bad. It's every 13 year-old's dream, provided you're a precocious 13 year-old with a revoltingly inflated opinion of yourself. Or any 13 year-old with access to a keyboard connected to the internet.

Short reviews are fine (except *Woodcutter Simulator* – it took me three hours to cut down a fucking tree, and I'll never forgive it for that). The routine: start the game, leave it on overnight to boost your time played stat on *Steam*, describe a couple of screenshots and give it 68%.

But then there's the big review. This is usually a cause for a celebration, because you can usually swing a day working from home, and working from home is the only excuse anyone needs to eat Kraft Singles. Beyond the big review is the most ceremonial review of all, the one where the publishers make you come to their offices.

This happened with *Mafia II*. Two days in Windsor, occasionally looking out of the window to see if the Queen's in. They make you do this partly to ensure you're playing the game on a top-spec PC, partly to make sure the code doesn't get leaked onto the internet, but mainly so that everyone involved in making the game can watch you play through a two-way mirror. At least, that's what you imagine, holed up in a pleasant, yet alien, room. That the guy who composed the music is sitting in a room in LA, watching a monitor, thinking, "He hasn't even put his headphones on. Why did I fucking bother?", and the guy who did the damage modelling on the cars is saying, "Crash, you bastard. Crash, then get out and look at it!"



"Start the game, describe a couple of screenshots and give it 68%"

And there's a body language expert, trying to convert your frowns and chuckles into a score, "He's put his hands down his pants, that's a good thing, right? Hang on, he's pulled out a massive clump of pubes and he's punching himself in the temple with them. Feed that into the machine."

The most blatantly charming case of this was at EA, during the *Medal of Honor: Airborne* review. Either through internal panic about the quality of the game, or an obnoxiously proactive marketing team, my playtime was interrupted a few times by one of EA's many money-gentlemen.

HONEST CORRUPTION

After an elegant dance, he asked me what score they could anticipate. Of course, I didn't tell him. Scores change as you play the game and write your review. And you never know how unrealistic their expectations are. If I'd popped another of those delicious free EA Kit Kats in my mouth said "Dunno, low 80s?", I could have been catapulted from the atrium. Finally, I'm a petty jealous prick, and this is the only shred of power I'll ever have over someone whose income and status belittles my own.

"I could tell you the first number," I said, my mouth still clammy with body-temperature chocolate, "but I could really do with a neck rub, first."

And that's how reviews work. Except for the bits I obviously made up. I'm trusting you to sift the jokes out here, don't let me down. **PCZ**

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JOIN THE COMMUNITY AND BECOME A HERO OF ANDARON



4STORY

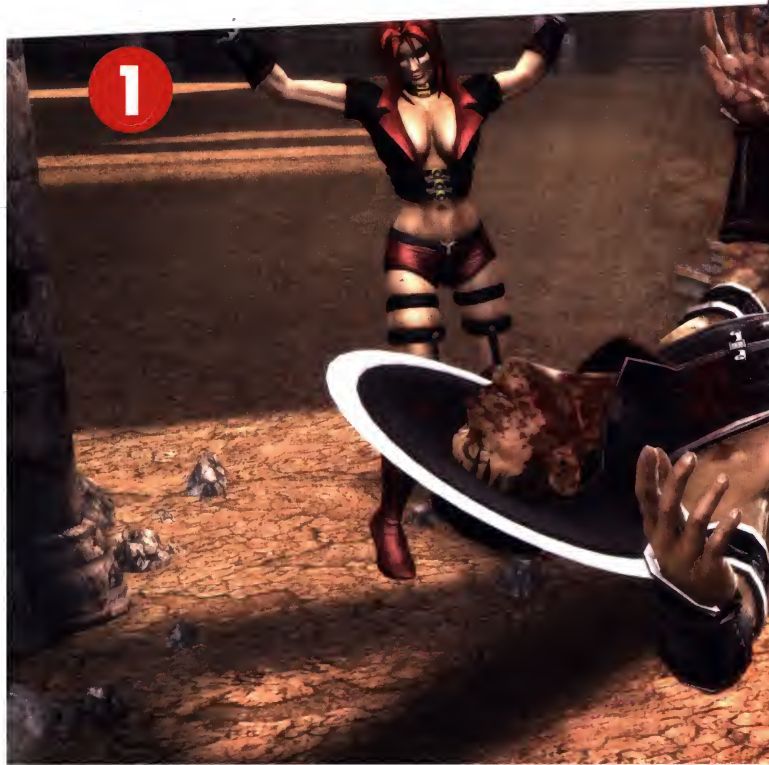
CALL TO ARMS

The two nations of Iberia have splintered into two factions: Derion and Valorian. Join thousands of online gamers and fight for disputed territory, besiege castles and wage all-out warfare against your enemies – or in their defense.

The fate of the gates of Andaron lies in your hands!



www.4story.co.uk



MORTAL KOMBAT

DEVELOPER IO Interactive PUBLISHER Warner Bros
WEBSITE mortalkombatonline.com ETA Spring 2011

FIGHTING GAMES RARELY grace our pages as we store rancid messes like *Body Blows* in lead-lined caskets to keep their foulness from spreading. However, *Mortal Kombat* has always worked on the PC – at least the first three did. The less said about the rest the better.

So when we hear that a new *MK* is coming that's going back to its roots and – most importantly – features bath tubs of the red stuff, we get excited. It's been a long time since we gave Johnny Cage a good kicking or admired Kung Lao's ability to slice people in half with his hat.

THE BIGGER PICTURE

1. 2D OR NOT 2D?

Mortal Kombat never worked as a 3D game. Ed Boon and his buddies on the *MK* development team have realised this, so the new game is doing away with 3D sidestepping and focuses solely on old-school horizontal plane action. Another tweak is this will be the fastest *MK* game ever: news which doesn't bode well for the cack-handed gibbons who work on a certain PC gaming magazine.

2. MEMORY MOTEL

Raiden was the original straw hat-wearing hero of *Mortal Kombat*. In the new game he's killed by Shao Kahn. As he dies he sends a mental message to *MK1*'s Raiden, who decides to do things differently, and so alters the events of the first three games. This means *Mortal Kombat* rewrites the plots of the original three games, allowing old favourites to appear. (Note: Raiden's not in this picture. That chap's Reptile.)

3. FRIENDS REUNITED

Boon, who's been involved with *MK* since its birth, says that if you had a favourite character from any of the first three games – like *MK3*'s Mileena, the lady with the sai – chances are they'll appear in this release, but they'll be slightly different because of the whole history-being-rewritten thing. Altogether there'll be about 26 fighters to choose from.

4. GORE GRIND

Boon says he's worried the game will be excessively violent, even by today's standards. Currently, the devs are aiming for a 'Mature' rating in the US, but Boon believes there will be so much guts and gore *MK* will end up with an 'Adults Only'. This will harm sales as kiddies will have to resort to underhand methods to obtain copies. Or just buy them from zombie-like store workers, who don't care for the laws of the land.

5. MOVE YOUR BODY

Signature moves for famous characters will be preserved. Scorpion's "C'mere!" is a definite keeper, as is Sub-Zero's freeze/upper-cut combo. No doubt this will also extend to the infamous fatality finishing moves, with Scorpion pulling his face off and roasting his enemy with a burst of breath-flame. But will hari-kari, babalities, animalities and the slightly satirical friendships make it back in?

6. DONOR CARD

Boon has also revealed X-Ray Mode: a combo that does 40% damage to your foe, and displays the damage you're doing to their internal organs. Each fighter will have different viscera, so Sektor's insides will likely be all wires and circuit boards while Sub-Zero's resembles a Slush Puppy. But what about Ermac (if he appears)? How can you rupture organs belonging to someone who's made of souls? These and other questions will be answered soon, no doubt.



Dropping a meteor shower
can be devastating.

Fearsome.

A REAL TRAIT...**GUILD WARS 2***David Brown* delves into the MMO's inner workings

AFTER SO MUCH time in the wilderness, it seems that NCsoft are making up for lost time. From giving out no information about *Guild Wars 2* to vast reams of text explaining lots of things in surprising detail, NCsoft are outdoing themselves. And making a humble journalist's job much easier, because we don't have to scabble around in the bowels of the internet to piece together scraps of rumours.

The major things they're talking about are traits, basically a way of making your character better at their profession. You earn them by scouring the globe for people who might reveal challenges to you. Complete one and you get a trait to be added to your character.

Each profession has a set of trait lines which can be configured how you like. Each is composed of major and minor slots. For example, warriors will have general lines called Power and Tactics, as well as specific lines for the weapons he or she chooses to use. Depending on the availability of the traits, there could be

a massive scope for creating unique builds for characters.

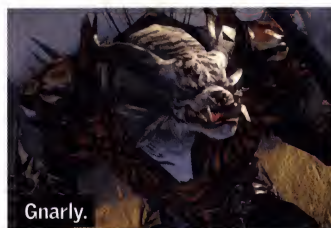
Traits are separate from a character's regular skills, complementing rather than replacing these abilities. Once you've chosen your skills, you can then assign traits to maximise their effectiveness. A warrior might try to stack his Power line with damage-boosting buffs, while adding ones that boost defence or reduce cooldown times on their most powerful attacks to the Tactics line.

GUITAR DUELS

In theory this system could massively diversify the foes you come across in *Guild Wars 2* PvP. Expect vast wiki sites to appear devoted to creating the ultimate build for particular classes. And a month later, how to defeat said builds.

Not everything's going to be about roaming the hills looking for monsters to slaughter, though. A big part of the MMO experience is adventuring with friends and building up guilds (obviously, for a game with the name *Guild Wars*).

One new way NCsoft is looking to get people together is by the introduction of activities: things that have no impact on the world or the plot, but are a diversion for battle-



Gnarly.

weary players who just want to have a laugh.

One of these is the bar brawl, where unarmed players have to use the environment to give them the edge, perhaps by picking a chair to club an opponent over the head or spitting beer in someone's face.

Other possible activities include a forming a band with a bunch of musical instruments found lying around, and a shooting range, though nobody has any

idea how these could work. *Folk Guitar Hero* with a *Guild Wars* edge?

Progress in the game and in the activities leads to the inevitable (and welcome) introduction of achievements. The titles of the previous game, given to players who'd, say, discovered 70% of the game's world map, will be implemented in a different way, and they'll be bound to your account, not the character that got the achievement.

There are also Feats, which are best described as daily achievements. These will be awarded for much smaller tasks that would be completed during the normal course of a game day, like killing a certain number of monsters.

All this is making *Guild Wars 2* sound like a very exciting MMO and the more we hear about it, the more we want to play it. **PCZ**

"All this is making *Guild Wars 2* sound like a very exciting MMO"



She-Ra! Princess of Power!

TOP OF THE CLASSES

Quick little note about the lovely killing power of the Elementalist (left). This is the *Guild Wars* profession that has the flashiest of the in terms of whiz-bang effects.

In *Guild Wars 2*, we fully expect NCsoft to ramp up this magic user's spectacular abilities, especially with the Phoenix spell, which sends a glowing bird of flame out to scorch the magic user's enemies.

Deadly, spectacular and great fun to play.

DRAGON QUEST IX

Sentinels of the Starry Skies

SQUARE ENIX

Nintendo

THE STEELIEST MONSTER YOU'LL MEET THIS YEAR...



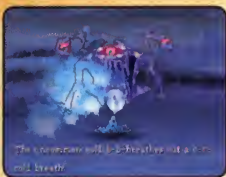
...CAN YOU BEAT HIM?

BATTLE TO BUILD UP YOUR CHARACTER



Does a total of 114 points of damage to Gath Golem.

If you defeat a lot of monsters you and your party members will get stronger and stronger.



The enemy uses a magic spell that is a cold breath.

There are certain monsters that are good at magic...



3 hits.

... others with lots of brute strength.



These are just a few of the colourful creatures you will battle.

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ETA
**WINTER
2011**I've got sunshine
in a bag...**THE ORIGINAL...**

WARHAMMER 40,000: SPACE MARINE

Adam Glick reckons shoulder pads are back inDEVELOPER Relic Entertainment PUBLISHER THQ [WEBSITE spacemarine.com](http://www.spacemarine.com)

WE ALL KNOW that videogames are about escapism and wish fulfilment. But for a frightening moment of introspection, think about where we gamers seem to want to escape to and what wishes we usually want to fulfil.

Our chosen destinations are usually either barren, war-torn environments or,

worse still, blasted post-apocalyptic wastelands where everybody on the planet is dead or horribly mutated.

As for wish fulfilment, it seems the person most gamers want to be is a snarling muscle-bound space marine who sweats testosterone, eats his enemies' firstborn and shits cast iron girders. I bet psychiatrists order a second Ferrari when they hear they've got a gamer in the waiting room. But if you want to satisfy those urges, Relic's new shooter ticks all those boxes, hell, it's even called *Space Marine*.

Set in the *Warhammer 40,000* universe, the game takes place on an enormous Imperial Forge Planet which has been comprehensively ruined by an

invading army of Orks. In order to claim back this sensitive corner of the Empire, the Ultramarines are sent in – a group of super-pious space knights, bred to be the universe's elite fighting force.

NOT CUDDLY

Essentially, you play as a seven foot tall genetically engineered man-tank, whose job it is to pile into the battlefield and crack some skulls. *Warhammer's* space marines are the most feared warriors around, so if you see one clomping around in that distinctive metal armour, revving a chainsword, you're advised to leg it before the limbs start flying.

The Forge World itself is impressively realised, with huge Gothic architecture

dominating many of the areas.

Warhammer's universe is all about the kind of scale that an extra 38,000 or so years of technological advancement would allow human beings to achieve, so these are the towering constructions that you'll be touring in the game. While *Space Marine* doesn't appear to be the most visually sumptuous shooter around, the sheer enormity of the levels and how dwarfed you feel by your surroundings more than makes up for a drab colour scheme.

Being in the enormous metal wellies of a space marine already looks like being a satisfying experience. For the most part you'll be playing from an over-the-shoulder perspective, popping

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Great universe
- ✓ Blends shooting and melee
- ✓ The Chainsword is ace
- ✗ Not exactly pretty
- ✗ Relic unproven as shooter dev

THE STORY SO FAR... RELIC



HOMEWORLD
Charming space strategy game marks impressive debut.

1999



DAWN OF WAR
Relic shows it can get the most out of the Warhammer universe.

2004



THE OUTFIT
Relic's only try at action gaming: a lackluster Xbox shooter.

2006



COMPANY OF HEROES
Relic makes a WWII RTS that's interesting.

2006

The Next sale took a nasty turn.



He was asking for it. Really he was.

KNOW YOUR ENEMY

- Orks are a race bred for warfare, the 'brain boyz' who designed them are long since dead.
- Orks call their weapons "choppas" and usually decorate them with garish paint.
- They believe that red vehicles travel faster than vehicles painted in other colours.
- These guys don't fear death. Which you wouldn't either if you were a beefy, armoured fighting machine.
- Occasionally Orks strap themselves to rockets to attack airborne foes.
- Psychic Orks are called 'Weird Boyz', and can summon fresh reinforcements into the battlefield.

enemies with recognisable weapons from the board games. The Bolter, for example, is the marine's standard shooter, a chunky pistol that fires explosive slugs. From what we can tell, the weapon handling looks crisp and responsive, with a zoom option for even more precision aiming.

Where things get really interesting is with the addition of true melee combat. Rather than just offering you the chance to clonk someone on the head with your weapon or elbow if they stray too close

to your hulking physical form, as soon as you hit the melee button *Space Marine* shifts gears. Your guy whips out a chainsword – predictably a brutal splicing of a sword and a chainsaw – and the camera instantly pulls back to a wider, nearly static shot, allowing you to flail around slicing enemies into tiny chunks without getting confused as to where you'll be waving the sword next. Essentially it swaps between *Gears of War* to *Devil May Cry* in an instant. And squeeze the trigger on a gun and the

camera snaps instantly back to the shoulder. They move fast for big lads, these space marines.

WORLD MADE REAL

The only niggling concern in all of this is Relic's back catalogue. They don't have a great deal of experience in the way of action shooters, their only one was poor compared to the huge selection of RTS and strategy titles that have cemented the developer as one of the darlings of PC development.

What's heartening is that if there's any developer who can do the *Warhammer* universe justice, it's this one. The *Dawn of War* series shows Relic knows the franchise inside out,

and it's highly unlikely that authenticity will be compromised in *Space Marine*.

Besides, this offers a perspective on a much-loved sci-fi universe that has never been seen before. Most people who immerse themselves in the 40,000 lore have to do so by painting tiny model armies and gathering around a bit of MDF with plastic trees stuck to it. *Space Marine* will allow them to live it and see the fruits of three decades of vivid imagination realised as an actual, 3D world.

If Relic can blend that with a satisfying core mechanic, *Warhammer 40,000: Space Marine* could well be an essential buy, for Warhammer and shooter fans alike. **PCZ**

"Dawn of War shows Relic knows Warhammer"

ETA
**27 AUG
2010**

"Take me to the nearest Oddbins or else."

HANDYCAM ADVENTURES...

KANE & LYNCH 2: DOG DAYS

David Brown finally gets to play with the hard men

DEVELOPER IO Interactive PUBLISHER Square Enix Europe WEBSITE kaneandlynch.com PREVIOUSLY IN... Issue 222

THE GRUESOME TWOSOME are nearly at the point where they have to earn their money, putting a reputation earned despite a deeply average first game on the line. There'll be no third chances, IO have to get things right this time round.

As of the time of writing, we've been able to get our hands on one element of

the game, the story mode, with the PC multiplayer element still tantalisingly unavailable for playtesting. So ignoring the potentially great online modes, it's time to stride into the prerelease build of *Kane & Lynch 2: Dog Days* to see if things are shaping up or falling apart.

The first thing we noticed was the camera, the much talked about shaky-

cam footage is meant to make things look like you're behind the anti-heroes, filming everything they do. You're meant to think beyond the, "Hang on, why is this guy hanging around in the middle of a gun battle?", mentality and suspend your disbelief for a bit.

BEST OF ENEMIES

The levels we've been privy to suggest this approach isn't an ill-judged piece of marketing, it really does make the now-standard third-person over-the-shoulder view much more interesting because of its unique take on things. It won't be a surprise if a number of other games come out adopting this feature as if their developers pioneered it.



"Mister, can we have our ball back?"

The game is panning out as expected, though. No amount of graphical trickery, image artefacts or jerky cameras can hide the relatively straightforward run-and-shoot action. What does seem to have worked is a variation on *Gears of War's* "downed" mechanic. In *Dog Days* you can be knocked to the ground, but not be out of the action. A quick tap of the C key forces Lynch, the shine-topped lunatic who you control in the single-player

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Shaky cam look
- ✓ Feels like a film
- ✓ Great acting and story
- ✓ Frantic pace
- ✗ Multiplayer yet to be tested
- ✗ Designed for consoles



Floaty.

THE STORY SO FAR...
**TERRIBLE
TWOSONES**



BUTCH & SUNDANCE
Nowhere near as sexy
and pacifistic as the
movie made them.

1899-1901



BONNIE & CLYDE
Far more violent and
less sexy than the
movie made them.

1932-1934



**HILLSIDE
STRANGLER**
Serial killers: not
sexy, very violent.

1977-1978



KANE & LYNCH
Extremely violent.
Only sexy if bald men
do it for you.

2007-NOW

"We can't wait to get
stuck into the full
version of *Dog Days*"



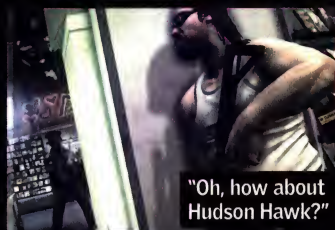
Chinese windows are
made from water.

game, to crawl or drag himself to cover
in order to recuperate.

If there's no cover available, you can
get up and try to get there, which is
obviously much harder. This seems to
work, giving you another chance in case
you balls up and run too far into danger.
It's pleasing to note that you go down
relatively frequently, especially on the
game's default Difficulty setting.

Even for us keyboard warriors, the
game seems to be very well balanced,
although this could be attributed to the
inaccurate nature of the weapons.
Pistols appear to be much more than
throwaway early game guns, remaining
useful as the game progresses due to
their high accuracy compared to
commonplace Uzis and shotguns.

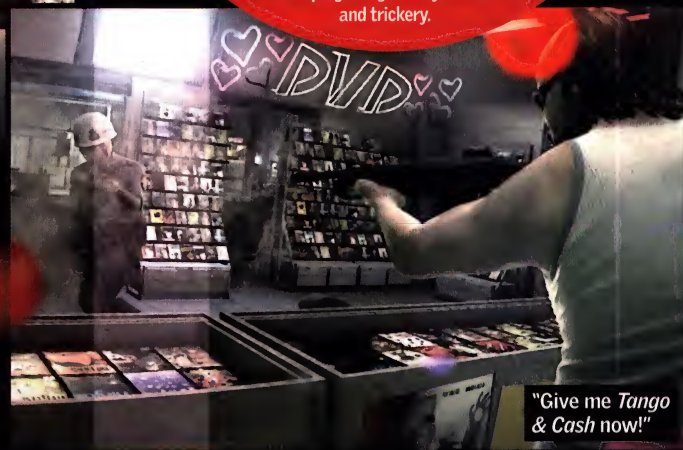
Another pleasing turn up is the plot,
which is already gripping enough to
make us want to see more. The voice



"Oh, how about
Hudson Hawk?"

acting on show is stellar, really
convincing stuff, and the whole setting,
plus the camera work, draws you in and
makes you feel as if you're part of a film.
Clichéd as it might be to say that, it's
true. There's always a sense of frantic
pace, with time between skirmishes
flitting past beautifully.

The set up of the second chapter is
especially intense, with the cutscene
camcorder footage making the
transition back to the normal game
seamless, keeping the all-important flow



"Give me Tango
& Cash now!"

going and really sucking you into the
events unfolding on-screen.

CALL A BUILDER

The verdict is definitely a qualified
thumbs up. Worries about whether the
devs could step up after the
disappointment of the first game have
proved, so far, unfounded, and their
boasts about the camera style have
similarly proved to be rooted in fact.

Niggles still remain – the camera
doesn't hide the game's blatant console

FRIENDS AND ENEMIES

The online elements of the game are extensive, with an online
two-player campaign co-op, and three competitive modes.
The co-op game will feature a help-your-mate mechanic along
the same lines as the one in *Gears of War*.

The competitive games are Fragile Alliance, Cops vs Robbers and
Undercover Cop, the latter being our potential favourite.

Cops vs Robbers is a straightforward team deathmatch. Fragile
Alliance sees a team of robbers attempt to flee a robbery with loot.
The twist is the loot is divided among the escapees, so if you want
to win the most, you'll have to consider making a run for it or
blasting your friends in the back and running with the cash.

Finally, Undercover Cop is the same as Fragile
Alliance, but with one of the robbers being
a police officer who has to stop any robbers
escaping using sneaky tactics
and trickery.

roots, with the almost hilariously
contrived structure of some areas
screaming "built for cover" at you.
At one point you come across a ledge
overlooking a wrecked building beneath.
It's a maze of low-lying walls that, one
would hazard a guess, would never exist
in real life.

In general, though, we can't wait to
get stuck into the full version of *Dog
Days*, both to see what happens in the
plot and to finally see what the
multiplayer side is all about. **PCZ**

1&1 Web Hosting Packages JUST GOT EVEN



Firewall



Syntax Checker



MySQL Administration



Spam Filtering



Google Sitemaps



1&1 EasyShop



Dynamic Content



1&1 RSS Creator



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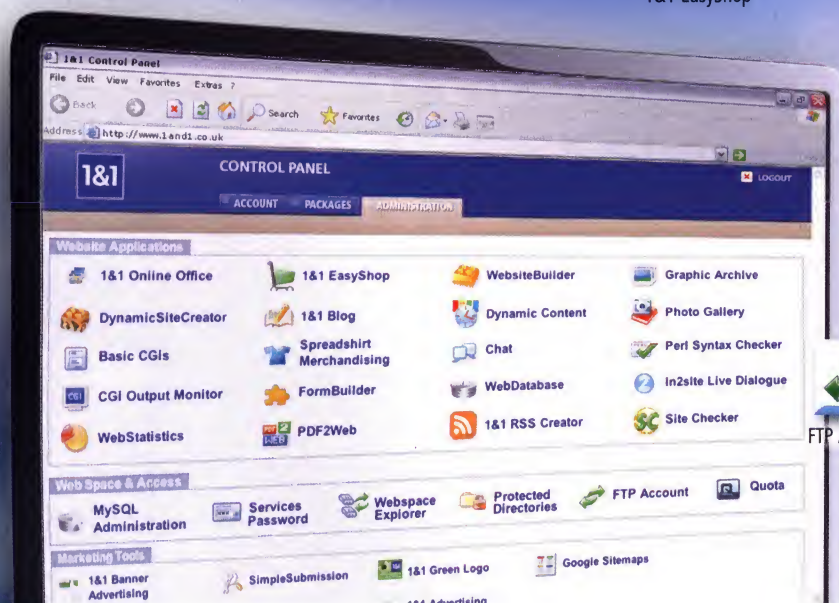
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SIBLING RIVALRY...

ASSASSIN'S CREED: BROTHERHOOD

David Brown finds he's not alone in his bale of hayDEVELOPER Ubisoft Montreal PUBLISHER Ubisoft WEBSITE assassinscreed.uk.ubi.com/brotherhoodETA
NOV
2010

DO YOU REMEMBER that bit in *Assassin's Creed 2* where Desmond and Lucy are scurrying through a Templars' lab, surrounded by Animuses? That's where the multiplayer element in *Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood* kicks off, eight players stuck in their ancestors' lives, attempting to knife each other and run off giggling.

This is the big thing Ubisoft are doing with *Brotherhood*, but you'll have to wait for it, as discussion must fall to the majority interest which is single-player.

The danger with *Brotherhood's* offline mode (or accurately, constant online mode because Ubisoft's DRM) is that it'll feel like playing the second game again. Ubisoft are adamant this is much more than *Assassin's Creed 2.5*, that it's a proper third game, even though it doesn't have a "3" in the title. But it could be very similar as, despite moving from Venice to Rome, it's about Ezio running around a city in Renaissance Italy.

EZIO'S KIDS

As this goes against Ubisoft's claim that *Brotherhood* is a full-on new game they have counter-arguments ready.

While it might just be another Italian city, Rome is massive in comparison to Venice, with five distinct districts to explore that form the game's entire setting.

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Multiplayer
- ✓ Horses in the city
- ✓ Assassins to order about
- ✓ Rebuild Rome
- ✗ Same-y single-player?
- ✗ Can't leave the city

He doesn't look 40...



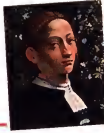
RODRIGO
Alexander VI (his pope name) was the most secular of all Popes.

1431-1503



CESARE
Rodrigo's son used his dad's influence to make his military career.

1475-1503



LUCREZIA
Rodrigo's daughter: alleged brother lover, poisoner, and murderer.

1480-1519



JOE
NBA's VP of Referee Operations isn't linked to the Renaissance.

1966-now

A silly place to hide your keys.

"Ezio's going to need backup, hence the 'Brotherhood' part of the game's title"



Roman fashions were rather 'out there'.

When you first set foot in the city, you'll notice how dilapidated it is, and you might note the lack of an upgradeable mansion, like you had in AC2. This is because you can spend money on upgrading the city itself, rather than a personal pad. It's a curious idea, and will be linked with the usual unlocks and so on, and is one idea we'll have to see in practice before we side with the yay or naysayers.

There won't be any trips into the leafy countryside either, but

you'll be able, for the first time, to travel the city with your horse. And you'll be appalled to know that Ubisoft are proudly hailing the pimping possibilities for your horse. No, Italian women aren't desperately lonely, they mean you can kit your equine pal out in a variety of bridles, saddles and sunglasses.

Story-wise, Ezio's now in his '40s, yet still nimble, sprightly and capable of slashing your whole family to death before you've even blinked. And he's not the only AC2 star coming back, either. Leonardo da Vinci will return, with his fun gadgets o' death, and we're promised more of Machiavelli, who flitted in and out of number two. Curiously, another character who'll make an appearance is one that was dead at the end of the second game, the Pope.

Pope Alexander VI (née Rodrigo Borgia) might have been brutally killed, but that isn't stopping him living and being a menace to all things Ezio in *Brotherhood*. He's brought in reinforcements this time, with his son Cesare and Lucrezia, his famously murderous daughter, getting involved. More famous Borgia and characters are



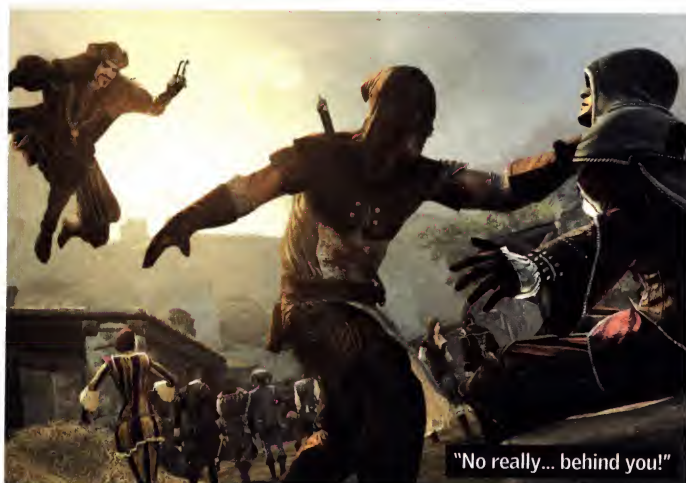
Weeeeeeee!

sure to be introduced as Ubisoft's hype machine begins to rumble on in the coming months.

As he was hard-pushed to deal with Rodrigo in the second game, this time Ezio's going to need backup: hence the 'Brotherhood' part of the game's title. As a grumpy middle-aged man, Ezio has decided to impart his killing wisdom to the various promising youngsters he finds as the game progresses.

Once you've collected them, they can be assigned different tasks using a curious chessboard-esque interface. Eventually they can even be called upon when you're out roaming. See a rather nasty guard holding a halberd/sword/rubber chicken with a pulley in the middle? Don't dirty your own blade with his vile common blood, just give a signal and suddenly one of the Ezio Juniors will come slinking from the crowd and empty the contents of the guards' stomach onto the ground with their knife.





"No really... behind you!"



Guess who?



Pimp your ride.

"You're not only hunting another player, but being hunted by one yourself"

everyone could see you were a player-controlled character, and remaining hidden is what *Hunted* is all about.

A *Hunted* level starts with eight players walking amongst a crowd of similarly dressed NPCs. Each player is assigned another player to kill, with a compass pointing towards their target. So you're not only hunting another player, but being hunted by one yourself.

As there are only eight different character models crowds won't be that diverse, but that's not the point: every player needs to blend in with the crowd to avoid standing out as a target. So you'll have to keep an eye out for any kind of suspicious behaviour, such as someone moving in an unexpected way (like right towards you).

PREYING PREY

The interesting thing about identifying your mark is that the NPCs will ape human behaviour as much as possible. One might start running for a while, or stop and look around. You go over to them and kill them and it turns out not to be a human, but your action clearly shows you are and, bam, you're the one with a knife in the ribs because you exposed yourself to your own hunter.

Hunted is a deliciously enticing prospect and one that you'd hope works as well in practice as it does in theory.

All this adds up to a familiar yet excitingly different experience for veterans of *Assassin's Creed*. There's the continuation of the main plotline and all the old favourites in the single-player mode, with the twist of a potentially brilliant multiplayer mode that will keep things interesting once you're tired of collecting feathers.

Brotherhood is looking like a game to keep an eye on, as it could surprise a lot of people. **PCZ**

Patrick Plourde even goes so far as to say, "strike first, strike fast," which sounds like the motto of an assassin's guild to us. It also applies to your enemies though, who'll be doing a lot more harrying than their docile brethren from games first and second.

Now to the multiplayer. The first bit of good news is it's being handled by Ubisoft Ancey. Not the most well-known of studios, but they did help make *Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow's* excellent multiplayer game.

The only mode we know about so far is Hunter, but it sounds a doozy. You start off walking in a crowd, a clock counting down to when you have control over your character. The reason for this is that if you appeared in the game stationary,

➤ If you do choose to fight the scoundrel, he might call up some equally nefarious buddies, so you'll be glad to hear there's more than one way to skin a variety of soldier-cats. A number of new melee moves can be chained together to take out multiple enemies, culminating in a 'rage mode' that gives an instant kill for every successful link in the move chain.

Ubisoft says pro-active players will be rewarded for their aggression. Designer

THE ART OF MURDER

Choose your weapon

As different character models are going to be used in the multiplayer game, so must new weapons be designed.

Reflecting your own chosen style of play – brazen or sneaky – you could perhaps choose an axe if you feel the time for stealth is past. Just find your target, whip out your head-splitter and get chopping.

Other, more subtle, tools include the claw – a metal thing with pointy bits on the front that you clamp onto your arm – the traditional dagger, and a syringe (filled with some kind of instant-kill poison we suspect).

Or perhaps you'd prefer to be a sultry Italian goddess who uses a razor-sharp fan as their killing device? Wouldn't we all, dear.

"Eeny, meeny, miny, moe.
Stab a lad in his toe..."



Ezio's biggest fan.

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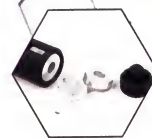


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CARLOS BORDEU,
FOUNDER, ACE TEAM

ROCK OF AGES

The Chilean indie devs follow up that compellingly vague E3 trailer...

ACE TEAM HAVE built up a huge amount of goodwill with their first release, *Zeno Clash* (issue 209, 78%). It wasn't the most sophisticated game around – a first-person melee game with strong hints of *Dark Messiah* – but the imagination and overwhelming artistry and that went into the game made it easy to fall in love with, flaws and all.

Their next game, *Rock of Ages*, was revealed at E3 this year, with an excellent, if vague, video. Was it medieval *Metro-Cross*? A Rococo *DiRT*? And what did everything mean? We chatted to one of the three Bordeu brothers behind ACE Team. Carlos answered some questions about the game itself, and their direction as a team...

Q A basic question first, can you briefly describe a typical game of *Rock of Ages*?

A In a single-player game the player fights against a CPU-controlled player. Both players are

trying to bring down the opponent's castle by rolling their boulder past all their opponent's obstacles.

That's how you win. It's a time challenge, where you defend and attack. Both players take it in turns to put out what defences they can afford, and after a while they can both start rolling down the enemy's side of the track, and try to hit the castle's gate as hard as possible.

This process is repeated until one of the players knocks down the gate and wins the round. You can earn more resources by destroying structures with your boulder as you go down the hill.

Is it designed to be a lunchtime game, or more time consuming?

Levels can be long or short depending on the length of the track, and also on the skill of players. Expert players can learn track shortcuts and if your opponent doesn't block the right places, a session could end up being short.

Is there a story behind the *Rock of Ages*, like there was in *Zeno Clash*?

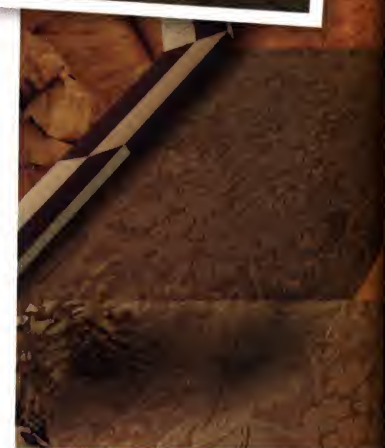


They have mammoths. We say, "Excellent!"

Rock of Ages isn't a project where the story is as important to the experience as in *Zeno Clash*, but that doesn't mean there isn't anything there. Humour plays a big part of the game's experience, rather than a complex story. Both games are very different.

We saw some interesting units in the video. What kind of powers do units like the cow and tree have?

The smaller units are easily run over by the player's boulder, so small units like the paper people build and give life to larger units like the towers. Each unit has a specific ability (the most basic one being to block part of the track). More complex ones include catapults, fans (these blow the boulder off the path), and moving units that pursue the boulder if it's in their proximity (like the war elephants and mammoths). We've eight categories, each with three different units or structures.



There will also be "super-units" which you earn by finding special items on the hill (you can't build them using your resources as you do with other units). One of these is 'The Bull of Heaven': a gigantic bull, twice as high than the tallest tower unit. This bull is obviously very dangerous to the attacking boulder.

So it's half strategy – building a track – and half racing skill – steering your ball?


Yes. The player controls the boulder (which can also jump). Using the ramps and the track to avoid obstacles is an integral part of the game. Although just playing the game with no obstacles in the level is still a fun experience because



<Insert "gathering moss" joke here>



That hill is a tad convenient isn't it?



<Insert Mick Jagger joke here>

"Rock of Ages isn't a project where the story is as important to the experience as in *Zeno Clash*, but that doesn't mean there isn't anything there"

many levels include shortcuts, jumps and alternate routes.

The tricky thing is learning where to put your defences so the opponent can't always use the fastest shortcuts. The strategic part of the game is transforming the regular course into an obstacle course with units. In a PvP game, both players have the "defence stage" and the "rock stage".

Why did you move from *Source* to the *Unreal Engine*?

The *Unreal Engine* seemed like the best choice now that we are planning on delivering our future titles to more platforms like Sony's PlayStation Network. Epic's technology is extremely versatile and powerful and we were

looking for a technical solution that not only met our needs for this game, but for all our future titles.

What lessons have you learned from the, largely positive, reviews *Zeno Clash* received?

It's hard to compare the experience of making a game such as *Zeno Clash* with *Rock of Ages*. I think some things that they share in common is that they're both games that are strongly artistic and very unique in design.

With the feedback we got from *Zeno Clash* we learned that a lot of gamers are looking for unique new games, and that's an incentive for us – to explore new game genres and ideas, which has lead us to create *Rock of Ages*.

Is it important to you that your games look so different, or does that just come naturally?

It's always been very important for us to be able to develop new ideas in the industry by creating original content.

One of our strongest incentives is developing creative work, and being able to show that we are able to deliver unique proposals.

We don't want to make just one type of game and stay anchored in the same place repeating our first formulae. So in a sense it comes naturally because our work reflects our interests, but at the same time developing original content was always a goal when we started ACE Team, so I guess it's a little bit of both.

Do you ever think you'll go back to your original, ambitious plans for *Zenozoik*? (This was an ambitious sandbox shooter/melee/RPG prototype of *Zeno Clash – Ed*)

Yes, we will – but with time. We did a lot of stuff for a *Zeno Clash* sequel while we were working on the *Ultimate Edition* and also while prototyping *Rock of Ages*. But we feel that *Zeno Clash 2* is something we have to develop with time and when it is the best project for us.

Making the same game over again (like some sort of expansion) isn't the best way we can grow as a studio. Right now *Rock of Ages* is our priority, but we have a lot of love for our first creation and we certainly aren't forgetting all about it, **PC7**

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COMING HOME...

PORTAL 2

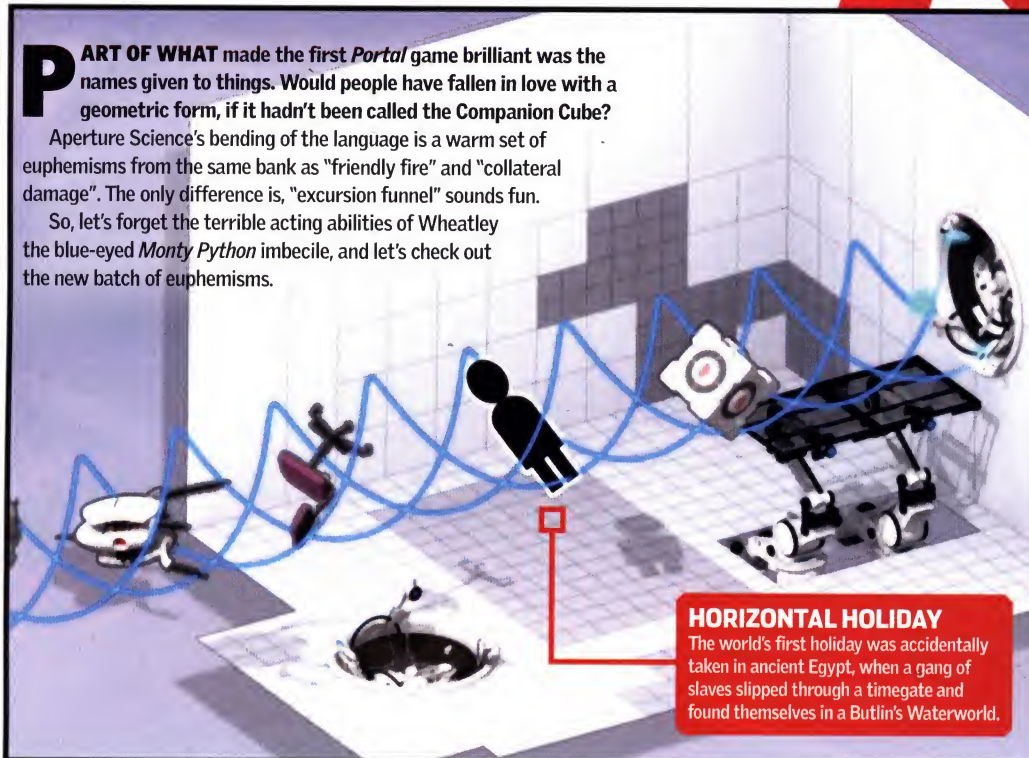
Jon 'Log' Blyth renews the vows he made to a metal crate

DEVELOPER Valve PUBLISHER Valve WEBSITE www.thinkwithportals.com

PART OF WHAT made the first *Portal* game brilliant was the names given to things. Would people have fallen in love with a geometric form, if it hadn't been called the Companion Cube?

Aperture Science's bending of the language is a warm set of euphemisms from the same bank as "friendly fire" and "collateral damage". The only difference is, "excursion funnel" sounds fun.

So, let's forget the terrible acting abilities of Wheatley the blue-eyed *Monty Python* imbecile, and let's check out the new batch of euphemisms.

**HORIZONTAL HOLIDAY**

The world's first holiday was accidentally taken in ancient Egypt, when a gang of slaves slipped through a timegate and found themselves in a Butlin's Waterworld.

EXCURSION FUNNEL**WHAT IS IT?**

When something enters the blue glow of the excursion funnel, it makes an ergonomic and pleasingly moist slurp. Once inside the funnel, and object will be carried along its path until an obstacle is reached. The funnel can also travel through portals, taking you, weighted cubes, and anything that isn't bolted down with it.

HOW DO I USE IT?

Find the source of the excursion funnel, and fire a portal of one colour into the location where it strikes a wall. Don't move that portal, and suddenly your other coloured portal comes pre-loaded with an excursion funnel. Of course, this means if you accidentally fire off a portal of the original colour, you'll lose the funnel, and your gentle means of levitation. You'll probably die.

WHAT ARE THEY SAYING ON THE INTERNET?

"Portal 2 will make stupid and retarded people shit their pants and kill themselves" - medusa1931, youtube.com

THERMAL DISCOURAGEMENT BEAM**WHAT IS IT?**

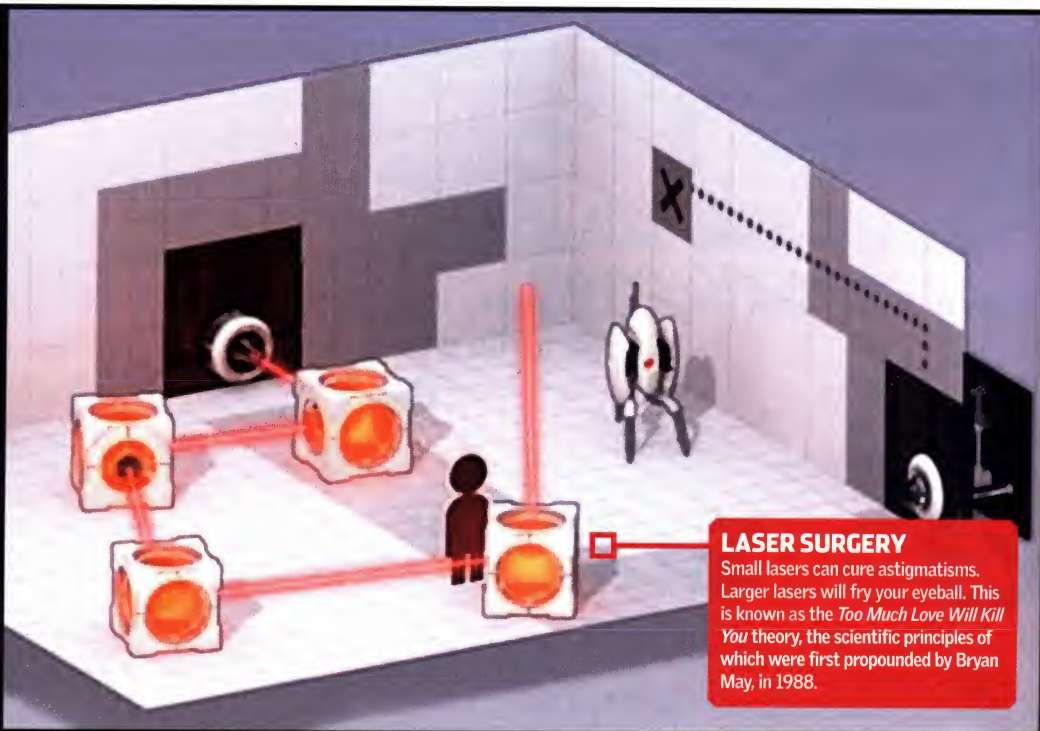
The thermal discouragement beam uses heat to deter certain patterns of behaviour - namely the situating of the subject's body in the path of the beam. If this happens, you'll probably die.

HOW DO I USE IT?

It doesn't just kill you with that classic Valve bone crunch, it also superheats and explodes the turrets that persistently shoot you. They've even been given a wider vocabulary to deal with this new method of despatch. You're not powerless, though. The beam can be guided by reflective cubes. Bring one of these cubes into play with a well-placed portal, and you can bend the end of the beam into a far less discouraging position.

IS THIS SCIENTIFIC?

Absolutely. Ablative armour defends against laser attacks in *Mass Effect*, and that's got quantum entanglement in it. That works on a similar principle: you can reflect these lasers with a mirror.

**LASER SURGERY**

Small lasers can cure astigmatisms. Larger lasers will fry your eyeball. This is known as the *Too Much Love Will Kill You* theory, the scientific principles of which were first propounded by Bryan May, in 1988.



OLD GREEKS
For Plato 'euphemism' was a euphemism for keeping you mouth shut.

LONG AGO



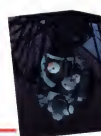
OLD ENGLISH
"Dandelion" became a substitute for "pissinlit", meaning "wet the bed".

DARK AGES



OLD GEORGE
George Orwell showed that euphemisms evolve into offensive terms.

1933



OH HELL
GlaDOS and its unique doublespeak make a welcome return.

2011

CO-OPERATION

When working together in couples, humans must be cautious to not do anything that might cause an impromptu sex act. This might result in light sleepiness and short-term emotional bonds that will not, whatever *Twilight* tells you, survive death.

BLIND FAITH

The issue of blind faith only became a problem in the 15th century, when two women became convinced that they could fly by attempting to climb on top of each other at the same time.

AERIAL FAITH PLATE

WHAT IS IT?

Classic leaps of faith require the leaper to make a conscious decision to have faith, and use that to encourage them to make an seemingly unwise leap. Aperture Science has eliminated the need for this decision making process, by catapulting the leaper involuntarily to his or her destination.

HOW DO I USE IT?

You don't use the aerial faith plate, it uses you. Simply walk or land on one, and you'll be slung without ceremony across the room. Probably onto another faith plate. It doesn't make a puzzle any more complex, really, it just makes them more disorientating, and requires you to act before you end up pasted into a wall.

IS IT SCIENTIFIC?

Similar technology was used in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, where a cow was slung into a castle from a trebuchet.

HAPPIEST COMMENT

"I was watching *portal 2* videos and i JIZZED IN MY PANTS" - nucca34

WELL GEL

Hair gel is a rich source of alternate power. A pea-sized dollop scraped from a hipster's fringe contains enough energy to catapult an egg over a fence.

PROPULSION AND REPULSION GEL

WHAT IS IT?

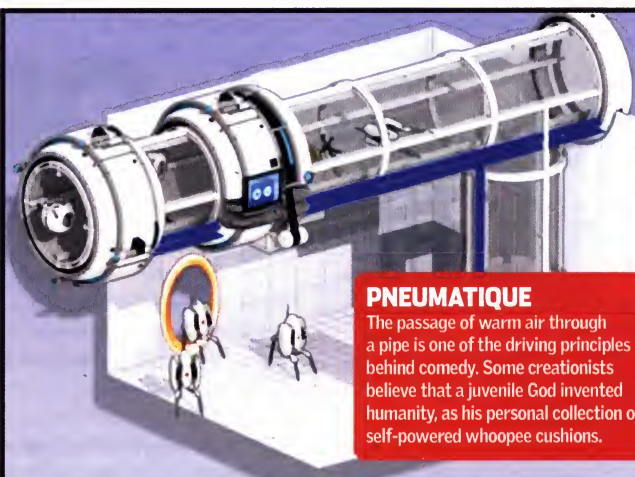
Propulsion gel is like emulsion, in that it paints any surface that it lands on. However, propulsion gel differs from regular home decorating products by jetting you forwards at terrific speeds when you touch it. Repulsion gel, meanwhile, bounces you a considerable height should you touch it.

HOW DO I USE IT?

First, get it where you want it. There are pipes with dripping leaks, and chutes that pour thick, globulous torrents of the stuff right at you, it's up to you to place the portals in positions that'll get it to coat the walls and floors where you need it most.

ARE THEY SCIENTIFIC?

It is unlikely that gels, paints or ointments will ever be used this way.



PNEUMATIQUE

The passage of warm air through a pipe is one of the driving principles behind comedy. Some creationists believe that a juvenile God invented humanity, as his personal collection of self-powered whoopee cushions.

PNEUMATIC DIVERSITY VENT

WHAT IS IT?

Modelled on the system currently in operation in supermarkets around the world, the pneumatic diversity vent harnesses comparative air pressure to create a powerful "flow", sucking up anything that enters it.

HOW DO I USE IT?

The suction from a pneumatic diversity vent is strong enough to suck up a turret and can also destroy walls. Neo-GlaDOS, however, seems to be on the case in this regard, replacing broken walls with those tiles that reject portals.

MOST OPTIMISTIC COMMENT:

"I hope, opening day of *portal 2* make *portal 2* for one day free. or not? i dont know" - SKMatoBB

ETA
**15 OCT
2010**There goes his
bottle of red wine.**FUN WITH STRANGERS...**

MEDAL OF HONOR

David Brown digs in and spends some time with EA's multiplayer beta

DEVELOPER EA Digital Illusions CE PUBLISHER Electronic Arts WEBSITE medalofhonor.com PREVIOUSLY IN... Issue 222

PLAYING A BETA is a risky thing. It's very easy to fall into the trap of thinking what you've got is finished code, especially when things go wrong.

At the time of writing *Medal of Honor* is due out in just under four months' time, and there's a lot of work to do to make this worthy of the franchise's name. (Or at least the first one.) Yet there isn't one issue in the beta that can't be fixed, nor is there any question about the game's fundamentals, which are tried, tested and extremely popular.

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Gameplay is solid
- ✓ Decent visuals
- ✓ All bugs fixable
- ✗ No team balancing as yet
- ✗ Seen it all before

As its being made by the company behind *Battlefield*, *Medal of Honor* has a pedigree that makes tills ring around the globe, but in a world where time is limited and a gamer's attention is held by the likes of the *Call of Duty* franchise and *Bad Company 2*, it's going to take more

"If you liked *Modern Warfare* you'll like this"

than a good reputation to dislodge the behemoths of the military FPS genre.

The multiplayer beta showcased two of *MOH*'s game modes that'll be on offer when it's released – team deathmatch and an objective-based assault. They're both familiar, perhaps overly so. The team deathmatch map is very similar to *Modern Warfare*'s Backlot

map, set in a partially constructed section of Kabul. It plays just as you'd expect – the battle lines shifting constantly and your back needing eternal watching because you never know when an enemy will come from behind to bury a dagger between your shoulder blades.

The second mode is of more long-term interest, although it's a clone of *Bad Company 2*'s Rush mode. One team has to defend a location against a perpetually spawning group of attackers. This mode works just as well as Rush, delivering incredibly tense action interspersed with frequent comedy rag doll trips into the land of the dead.

The beta demonstrates that the fundamentals are being adhered to, so if you liked *Modern Warfare* and *Bad Company 2*, you'll like this.

As we played an early beta, it's worth stressing that the following criticisms will likely be addressed by DICE over the next few months, but currently they're all relevant.

The most obvious problems are the lack of team balancing and restrictions on which team you can join during games. At one point in a particularly



THE STORY SO FAR... MEDAL OF HONORS



ALLIED ASSAULT
The worst ending ever, but defined cinematic first-person shooters.

2002

PACIFIC ASSAULT
While *Call of Duty* was raising the bar, *MOH* was stagnating.

2004



AIRBORNE
Despite parachuting into Europe, the third game was average.

2007



MEDAL OF HONOR
Will the reboot push *MOH* back to the top or will it die in the desert?

2010



gruelling match, where the *PC ZONE* team were being spawn-mortared and sniped, a tap of the Tab key revealed the sides were 10 vs 4, in favour of the defenders. The worst thing was, it was still possible for a player to switch sides and make it 11 vs 3.

A full server at least guarantees even sides, if the server browser lets you in. During our play test it was flaky, with either the list failing to refresh or the connect button remaining unresponsive. Once in, there are plenty of other niggles

plaguing players: a text chat system that freezes the player in place and requires a death to clear it from the screen; no information as to who you've just killed; no information as to which server you're on; a friends system that deletes your buddies when you try to click the join button; and even the lack of information as to your latency.

FUTURE HOPE

There might be tonnes of little flaws and oversights that an experienced developer like DICE shouldn't miss – really basic things like the team balancing – but there are plenty of reasons to be positive, because *MOH*'s foundations are as good as you'll see in any other modern multiplayer shooter.

When it works, *MOH*'s reboot is the equal of anything out there, and all of the problems should be fixed by the time the game comes out. They're not crippling flaws, but glitches and oversights that'll likely have been fixed and included by the time you read these words.

When this is the case, we'll be able to get a much better idea of what *Medal of Honor* is going to be. At the moment, the beta has provided far more questions than answers. **PCZ**

Red dot sights are unlocked items.

ANATOMY OF A MINOR WAR Afghans vs US Army



OBJECTIVE 1

As the US army you have to clear a roadblock preventing your tanks from advancing on the enemy positions.



OBJECTIVE 2

Once this has been achieved, advance up onto a nearby hill to clear out the defenders pounding the road with rocket and mortar fire.



OBJECTIVE 3

Covered by your newly liberated light armour, your third task is to trudge across the river bed and make your way towards a bunker.



OBJECTIVE 4

As the Afghan defenders, once you've lost the bunker, you've got to retreat to a second roadblock, which is even more hotly contested than the first.



OBJECTIVE 5

The last stand for the Afghans, this anti-aircraft position has to be held or you'll be levelled by bombers.

ETA
**30 SEP
2010**Nothing like cat-woman
on Dodo violence.**STILL NOT FINAL...**

FINAL FANTASY XIV: ONLINE

Will Porter says FF11 can be renamed *Penultimate Fantasy*

DEVELOPER Square Enix PUBLISHER Square Enix WEBSITE finalfantasyxiv.com

EVERY NEW MMO seems to be laced with the DNA of *World of Warcraft*. The assumption is that everyone with a latent interest in looting, crafting or exchanging suggestive emotes now understands how *WOW* works, and so its keymaps, controls and occasional idiosyncrasies

have spread through the realm of the massively multiplayer like chicken pox through a nursery.

The Old Republic will have its differences in content, but it'll still be *WOW* in space boots. Sure, Blizzard's systems are inherited from earlier games, but *WOW*'s universal spread and popularity is still the tie that binds MMO development together.

Yet Azeroth never took Japan. Square Enix, developers of the almighty *Final Fantasy* series, are the British arrows in *Dad's Army*, delivering punchy jabs across the sea in righteous indignation as Blizzard's arrows swirl menacingly through China. Just who do

you think you are kidding Mister Arthas? No-one thinks that the *Final Fantasy* franchise is on the run, but if it was, it certainly wouldn't introduce a silly *Warcraft* 'jump' button.

FINAL DEMAND

While other MMOs have thundered into gaming loud and proud before watching their player numbers plummet, 2002's (well, 2004's on PC) *Final Fantasy XI* has retained a constant audience.

"Although the marketplace appears to be crowded, *FF11*'s player numbers haven't really changed in eight years," explains Hiromichi Tanaka, Square Enix's Senior Vice President of

Software Development and Corporate Executive of Online Business Management (a man whose job title brings joy to the heart of a freelance journalist writing to a word count).

"The only MMO with an increase in subscribers is *World of Warcraft*. All the other titles are appearing but disappearing at the same time. But a lot of people have joined the MMO market, so it does have a lot of potential."

The target audience for *FF14*, though, is really the people who've stuck with *FF11*, and any other *Final Fantasy* fans who've never partaken of grind. As such, apart from being more cartoonish, *FF14*'s new land of Eorzea doesn't

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Improved *Final Fantasy* MMO
- ✓ More character dev freedom
- ✓ Less time-consuming play
- ✓ Giant crabs
- ✗ Clunky console interface
- ✗ Lack of appeal for PC fans

THE STORY SO FAR... FINAL FANTASY MMOS



**THIS FINAL 11
IS FANTASY**
FF11 hits Japan.
Becomes big there.



**11 FANTASIES!
FINAL!**
FF12 hits the rest of
the world.



**FANTASTICAL
FINALITY 14**
FF14 is announced.
Chocobos on horizon.

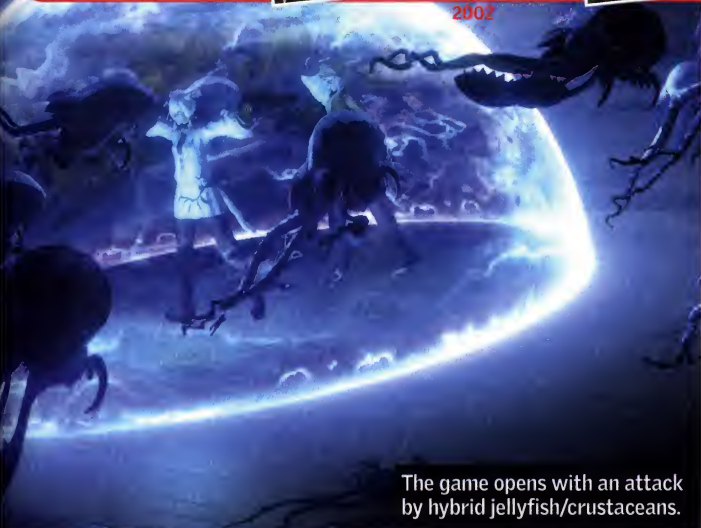
**FOR TEEN FANTASY
(FINAL)**
FF14 totally imminent.
Chocobos incoming.

2002

2004

2009

2010



The game opens with an attack
by hybrid jellyfish/crustaceans.



This game will please
the 'blue sky' brigade.



"You shall! Not! Pass!"

NOT SO FINAL FANTASY...

Even an end has a start.
Or so the *Editors* say

As can be expected in any *Final Fantasy* game, *FF14*'s cutscenes are stunning; as is the way that your freshly customised avatar is contained within them.

The game opens with your character on a rocking ship, surrounded by slumbering characters from the various other races (and their sub-races) that you bypassed during character creation. You hear a strange ethereal voice and venture up on deck, where heavenly flashing lights surround you before suddenly reverting the scene to reality.

A storm is raging around you, and, as a tutorial, you've got to fight some jellyfish-with-legs creatures that have been swept on deck. It's through strange experiences and flashbacks like this that you'll come to understand the tragedy that has befallen Eorzea, but for now you'll have to be content with sticking knives in a few invertebrates.

present much of a stylistic change from the Vana'diel of *FF11*. The game's five playable races are entirely similar to those of *FF11* to boot. From the humanesque Hyur, the elf-y Elezen, the cute short-arse Lalafell and the rugged Roegadyn, all the way to the Miqo'te, who look a bit like cats.

Yet there are big changes afoot. For one, *FF11*'s traditional XP harvest and prolonged levelling frenzy has been ditched. In its place instead is what Square Enix call an Armoury system: player's items level up through use.

"FF11's XP harvest and prolonged levelling has been ditched"

This means that you're not tied to one build and could warhammer in the morning before switching to waving a magical stick in the afternoon and early evening.

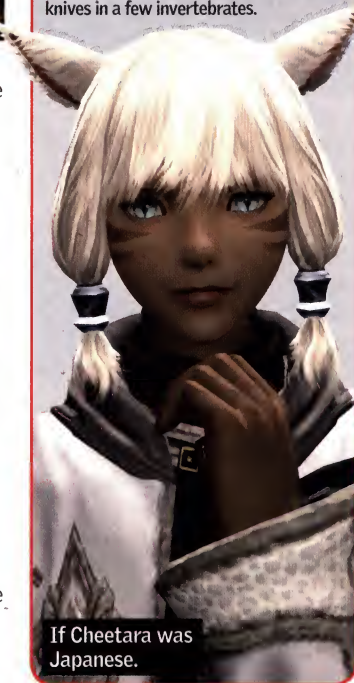
FF REBORN

Each character will get an overall physical level that increases as you play improving your character's baseline stats, but there isn't a need to commit to a single character mould. Avatars can be a Disciple of War, Magic, Land, or Hand, and can join any number of skill-

specific guilds in one of the game's three starting cities. But there's freedom in the equipment sets you use and the directions in which one character can specialise. There's a real taste of Capcom's *Monster Hunter* about the way it works, and even *Ultima Online*.

On top of this the game, which once demanded considerably long play sessions, can now be sampled in bite-sized chunks. And the need to play with a tight all-encompassing party of fellow adventurers has been excised making solo play is now far more of an option.

This is enabled through the introduction of side quests known as guildleves (named after the quasi-religious icon the quest giver hands you when you take a job). These missions are short, simple stat boost n' loot affairs. Columns of a crystalline substance called Aetheryte initiate these quests



If Cheetara was
Japanese.

Mobs don't attack if you're way more powerful than them. Clever mobs.



and end them by handing over the loot reward, as teleporting you there and taking you in and out.

During a guildleve mission when I was hands-on with *FF14*'s current build, I took on some giant crabs in a cave – megalocrabs, even. I hacked and I slashed, building up tactical points to unleash greater powers as I did so, and retreating megalocrabs persisted in leading me into areas of ever-denser megalocrab populace. Having attacked all of their weak points for massive damage, I emerged the victor.

BRIDGING GAPS

Later, in another guildleve, I wandered over a hillside collecting pages of a torn manuscript, killing angry salamander-things the pages occasionally spat out.

Let's make no bones about it as I'm, in what is common parlance, "a *WOW*-a-like carebear", *FF14* at first seems fiddly, alien and confusing. *FF14* is its

own game, and while it'd love to welcome in an extra swathe of Western audience, it's not changing to fit more snugly into their rigid tastes. For one, the game's interface is a cascade of windows and menu options designed for use on the PlayStation 3.

"The way *FF14* works is something of a culture shock"

Aside from user-enabled graphical fiddles *FF14* is identical on consoles and the PC. In an era of ever-smoothed UI's and unobtrusive pull-out menus in PC gaming, the way *FF14* works is something of a culture shock.

Then again, perhaps this isn't such a clear opportunity to pull out the old

PC gaming righteous indignation routine. *Final Fantasy XIV*'s servers allow console and PC players to play together, with the PC Oseen as a companion platform to the PS3 version, not a separate online contingent and community.

"Most people, if they're playing from home they might use the PlayStation," explains Tanaka-san, when asked whether console and PC players habitually play together. "But if they log in from work, they will probably use the work PC. It's the same people, just using different platforms." (Tanaka-san being

Square Enix's Senior Vice President of Software Development and Corporate Executive of Online Business Management, I'm not sure if I mentioned that before.)

So is there appeal here for existing PC-types looking for a fresh MMO fix? Well, if you've got a taste for all things JRPG then yes, probably. But, in that case, I'd be surprised if you were idly flicking through *PC ZONE* rather than sitting on fan pages discussing which *Final Fantasy* had the best swishy haircuts. (Watch, when this article appears on the internet, that last sentence will inspire an entire comment thread of pain).

The truth for me is that when compared to upcoming MMOs like *The Old Republic* and *The Secret World*, *FF14*'s fugly UI and generic beast-chases don't arouse my want glands.

In terms of second-to-second game mechanics and combat, what's hugely

CITY-STATE OF THE NATION

Welcome to Limsa Kominsa! The Skegness of Eorzea!

Limsa Lominsa is one of three starting cities you can choose to frequent. A seaside collection of streets and by-ways suspended above the ocean, hugging tightly to rocky pillars that jut out of the sea. It's here that you'll peruse the guilds available to you, check up on the little chap you've hired to sell on your old equipment at the market and gather story quests and guildleaves alike.

This is a pretty place, packed with NPCs with vaguely silly names, a favourite being 'pissed pirate' who can be found outside the culinary guild.

Other starting cities come with their own storylines and inhabitants, namely the forest city of Gridania and the gambling obsessed money-haven that is Ul'dah.



Limsa Kominsa:
hated by lispers.

machinations behind a Wizard of Oz curtain. *FF14* is content to stand on stage curtain free, with its buffed-balls out and on display, saying "Hi, I'm *Final Fantasy XIV*. Grind me and I'll give you a chocobo!"

JAPAN ONLY?

Clearly, none of this stops the constituent parts of *FF14* from being an absorbing experience for those with the mind-set to get deep inside it. There's an existing, rabid audience for *Final Fantasy* online games. Through being constant, different, and constantly different it's an MMO fortress that has not been breached either within Japan or by the wider world. While other games turning up wearing



This is tantamount to
animal cruelty, surely?

As ever with *FF*, the monster design is awe-inspiring.

impressive and forward-looking on a console is humdrum on the PC. On the surface, at least, there's little here that could be labelled as an entirely new experience for those who've dabbled in PC MMOs in times past. It doesn't help that *FF14* appears to be pretty daunting either. Western MMOs have become more skilled at hiding their stat



Aetheryte crystals
book-end your quests.



No idea who this is.
But he is AWESOME.

a map that looks a bit like Azeroth and carrying a lunch box shaped like a goblin are in free-fall a few years later, *Final Fantasy XI* has found a profitable, sustainable, and rather large, niche for itself. *Final Fantasy XIV* will continue the same pattern, and with the

added freedom in character development and gameplay that'll satisfy everyone who has a pleasant history with *FF11* and the series as a whole.

This game isn't for me, but that doesn't mean to say I'm bitter and resentful about the fact that a lot of cross-platform gamers will in all likelihood get kicks from it. **PCZ**

CAR DREAMING...**DRIVER: SAN FRANCISCO****Adam Glick** has taken the flower from his hair and squished itDEVELOPER Reflections PUBLISHER Ubisoft WEBSITE uk.ubi.com

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO *Driver*? The first game showed so much promise as an effortless pastiche of classic '70s car movies, such as *Bullitt*, *The French Connection* and, well, *Driver*. It's pretty roundly agreed, though, that as soon as the player was allowed to leave the car, which debuted in the console-only *Driver 2: Back on the Streets*, things went south faster than a rocket powered swallow.

The last effort to collapse in a heap onto a PC disc was *Driver: Parallel Lines*, in which you played a filthy, unshaven and unlikeable hippy in a rotten PlayStation 2 port, and the on-foot action was utter bum. Well now Ubisoft has found a way to replace the dreadful pedestrian sections without limiting you to a single car for the entirety of a mission. Sadly, there's still a good chance *San Francisco* will be utter guff as well.

IN YOUR HEAD

The mechanic Ubisoft has come up with, called Shift, is a sort of strange astral projection-inspired method of car switching. Touch of a button and you're suddenly zoomed out of the cockpit *Google Earth*-style and find yourself hovering above the action with a free camera, able to drop into the drivers' seat of any other car in the traffic below.

The conceit that allows for this bizarre nonsense to happen is that Tanner, the original *Driver*'s lead character, is in a coma after a head-on collision with the antagonist from *Driver 3*, Charles Jericho.

Because the game takes place in Tanner's dreams, he's able to flit between everything from pokey Alfa Romeo MiTo's to thunderous Pagani Zondas, as

ETA
**EARLY
2011**

Hey what's that car doing with laser beams?

PLAYER 2

PLAYER 3

"Tanner, the original *Driver*'s lead character, is in a coma"

over 100 cars are in the game. Naturally the mechanic has to be tempered somehow, so you'll have a Shift meter that depletes every time you're outside of a vehicle. Spend too long umming and aahing about which ride to pick and it'll run out. Fortunately, it can be built back up again by performing daring driving manoeuvres, such as power slides, jumps and carving through oncoming traffic.

The Shift system upgrades as you progress through the game, eventually allowing you to zoom out and skip across the entire city in a matter of moments. Later, you'll unlock Quick Shift, which allows you to quickly zip ahead to a marked vehicle that is also participating in a chase, for example.

Now it'd be easy to dismiss the storyline as pointless if it's happening inside someone's head, stories ending with "it was all a dream" are bad enough, let alone ones that start with it. Reflections are keen to point out that Tanner's coma dream is being affected by outside influences, presumably discussions that occur by his hospital bedside.

Also, don't expect a dreamy, insubstantial plot inside Tanner's head. Reflections also say that Tanner still thinks he's an undercover cop, just one blessed with some kind of mystical superpower. He'll still be performing investigations and

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Licensed cars
- ✓ Great car chase city
- ✗ Bit ugly
- ✗ Shift unconvincing
- ✗ Trailblazer is rubbish

THE STORY SO FAR... REFLECTIONS



SHADOW OF THE BEAST
Creepy side-scrolling action adventure.

1989



DESTRUCTION DERBY
PlayStation crash 'em up that led to three sequels.

1995



DRIVER
The closest videogame has ever come to recreating Bullitt.

1999



PARALLEL LINES
Confused dual storyline and rotten missions make this a series low.

2006

San Francisco has never looked duller.

MOVIE MADNESS

Driver: The Movie wallows in development hell

GOOD TIMES



2003
Game fan director Paul WS Anderson secures the rights to make a *Driver* film. Suggests he'll shoot after finishing *Resident Evil: Apocalypse*.

OK TIMES



2006
The rights move to Rogue Pictures. Roger Avery is attached to direct and write, and shooting is scheduled to start in Canada in 2007.

BAD TIMES



2007

Toronto's Cinespace studio - where the film was to be shot - is closed. The film is put on hold.

Work begins

Tough times...

Prison time



2007

Toronto's Cinespace studio - where the film was to be shot - is closed. The film is put on hold.



2009
A script for the film penned by Avery is leaked onto the internet. There are portions of the story set in Iraq. In November, Avery is jailed for manslaughter and drunk driving after being involved in a lethal car crash.

attempting to get to the bottom of what's going on, and the developer has hinted that this information might be useful when he finally awakes.

Unfortunately the game hardly announces itself with a fanfare after trying the game out in a multiplayer mode called Trailblazer. *San Francisco* seems lacking in colour and character (draining the life out of this particular city means Reflections have achieved one near-impossible task at least) while the cars aren't particularly stunning or their handling anything special.

Worst of all, the mode was designed to accommodate Shift and, as a result, was utterly

without drama. For a start, instead of racing, the aim was to remain in the light trails behind a DeLorean that was cruising in laps around the city streets. As if this wasn't pedestrian enough, the Shift mechanic ensured that if you screwed up you could instantly recover, ruining any sense of tension.

We're sure this isn't the only multiplayer mode in the game, but if it's the one Ubisoft consider highlights the

game at its best, the forecast for *Driver: San Francisco* is crap.

Reflections can still pull things off, as there are months until the game's release. We've fond memories of the original *Driver* and, in spite of the Shift mechanic, the dev claims this game is a return to the roots of a series that's lost its way. That said it needs to be a lot more impressive than what we've seen so far to make any kind of impact. **PCZ**

Ready to be
TWOced.

Oh, he's excited.

ETA
**19 NOV
2010****ON YER MARKS...**

NEED FOR SPEED: HOT PURSUIT

Adam Glick is just a Bandit looking for his Smokey...

DEVELOPER Criterion PUBLISHER EA WEBSITE needforspeed.com

THERE AREN'T MANY game mechanics that I outright hate. The obvious one is the quick time event, whoever thought that having to react to on-screen button prompts, and then be smacked down and made to repeat the sequence if you get it wrong is a fun way to play through an action sequence should be folded up, crammed into a dustbin and fired into the Grand Canyon using a hydraulic catapult. There is at least one other though, the low-speed car chase.

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Gorgeous
- ✓ Fast
- ✓ Stunning cars
- ✓ Ace power ups
- ✗ No news on single player
- ✗ Killer PC required?

You know the ones, the races where you have to tail a person, staying an arbitrary distance away to avoid being spotted, but without lagging an arbitrary distance that is too far behind them, otherwise you lose them. This is the vehicular equivalent of blue balls, as you hover 30 metres behind someone while slamming on the brakes if you accidentally over-squeeze the fun pedal.

GIMME SPEED

Car chases should be about outrageous velocity, a total disregard for the rules of the road, and as many hard handbrake turns as you can make before your bicep pops out of your arm and slaps against the windscreen. Criterion know this, which is why you'll be going hell for leather at all times in *Hot Pursuit*. This is a game dedicated to the glory of high-speed police chases.

This is also the reason why Criterion promise that, unlike more recent entries in the series, you won't see any Ford Focuses stinking up this game. It's all about the most exotic, desirable vehicles in the world and driving them as if you're being chased by an Apache gunship. To ensure the police aren't left in a cloud of tyre smoke, the *Burnout* developer has decided to bend the rules a bit.

Imagine if a police force, instead of paying their executives astonishing salaries, fired the lot and blew taxpayers' money on a set of Bugatti Veyron pursuit vehicles. Imagine the terror of a gang of chain-smoking 13 year-olds in a stolen



"Damn I nearly hit Clarkson. Time for one more try..."

Cavalier as the fastest production car on the planet flicks on the blues and twos behind them. In *Hot Pursuit*, the cops are just as kitted out as the racers.

Your playground is an enormous open-world environment rather than the choked, congested streets of a city. This makes the game all about blasting along arrow-straight highways, around sweeping curves and up winding mountain roads riddled with hairpins.

"A game dedicated to high-speed chases"

THE STORY SO FAR... CRITERION



TRICKSTYLE
Dreamcast hoverboard
trick game. Pretty but
handled like rubbish.

1999



BURNOUT
Got lovely graphics
and crashes out of
console tech.

2001



**BURNOUT 3:
TAKEDOWN**
The definitive console
Burnout game.

2004



BURNOUT: PARADISE
Criterion's try experiment
at open-world racing
inspired *Hot Pursuit*.

2009

What you get when
Lamborghini sponsors
the police.

This being Criterion, *Hot Pursuit* is a stunningly beautiful game that thunders along at an electric pace. It's truly a developer and license marriage made in petrolhead heaven.

TOM AND JERRY

The mode that EA was allowing eager journo's to get their hands on was a two-player cat-and-mouse chase mode.

One player slips into the bucket seat of a racer, the other one parks their doughnut-fed buttocks into the cockpit of a similarly pacey sports car, replete with black-and-white police livery. The racer's job is to get a certain distance from the rozzar for a certain amount of time, whereas the filth is charged with knocking seven shades out of the suspect until their car cartwheels to a halt.

This isn't about *Burnout* insta-crashes, as the racer has an damage bar that must be built up until they hit 100%, which takes a fair amount of bumping

and shunting. In a neat touch it never leaps straight up to full damage, always halting at 99% beforehand so the racer has one last chance to get away. If they do, the damage meter drops back down to 90% as a stay of execution. This sounds artificial but it works beautifully.

In addition to driving skills, you get power-ups that are unlocked depending on how the chase is unfolding. The racers get the opportunity to scramble police radar, giving them vital moments to dash down an off-road corner or hide behind a bit of scenery, before blasting off in the other direction. The cops get backup in the shape of deployable road blocks and even helicopters that drop stingers on the road ahead of fleeing perps. These boosts don't break the game's suspension of disbelief, and they help to ensure that chase remain closer and more tense for longer.

EA has only shown off a tiny fraction of *Hot Pursuit* and we have no idea what the single-player game will offer, but we're already intoxicated like we've been huffing petrol fumes. Rather than appealing to the seven people who still drive around in understeery, front-wheel-drive circles in Burger King car park, *Need For Speed* is back to what it should be about, deeply desirable, totally unattainable sports cars. **PCZ**

SHOWN UP

Anything can happen during a live demo

Amazing as *NFS: Hot Pursuit* is, the demo at EA's E3 showcase did its very best to make the game look hideously boring. The same cat-and-mouse multiplayer mode I saw was played live on stage, but unfortunately in Criterion's attempt to keep the chase close, there was a lot of unenthusiastic hanging around. The same kind of thing you do when you're playing against a friend who isn't very good, and you don't want them to launch your monitor out of the window in a fit of pique.

So it wasn't until people got their hands on the game at EA's booth and gunned it that they realised not only does the mode work, it's also enormous fun. Moral of the story? Don't try and fake stuff in live demonstrations, if your game is good, just play it.

Here endeth the sermon.



Great car.
Shit colour.



Police were on the lookout
for a penis metaphor.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF...

BULLET TIME

Will Porter rakes through
the past of the most
enduring of FPS gimmicks.
In slow-motion

Chow Yun Fat: great actor, shame about the game.

VARIATIONS ON bullet-time are legion, yet the essence remains the same. Slow down the action, make enemies say "Faaaarrccck" in a deep bass, and allow the player some extra time to lock onto his prey. And if you can slot a stylish visual tick with a spinny camera or a trip on the behind of a bullet, then so be it. It's corny and it's become hackneyed, but it's sure as hell isn't going anywhere anytime soon.

Seeing as you're a PC gamer, you've no doubt come across bullet-time early in your gaming career, the combined efforts of a lack of RAM or a crap graphics card producing unforeseen John Woo-isms. For me, it came with the third person sections of the *Die Hard Trilogy* back in 1996. I played through the majority of John McClane's sub-par Las Vegas adventures at half-speed, yet somehow had fun. Since then though, bullet-time has not only garnered a name but also a chequered past.

In gaming, the phrase bullet-time has spread to cover everything that involves a spot of slow-motion. When talking about it in films, however, we should first track the phenomenon of bullets seen cutting through the air, which didn't begin with *The Matrix*.

CINEMATIC ORIGINS

The very first side-on shot of a bullet in flight came in low-budget action movie *Kill and Kill Again*, a movie that sees its hero, Steve Chase, go up against the evil Marduk and his army of remote controlled karate slaves. You'd be advised to check out the trailer (bit.ly/kkatrailer), mainly because it's hilarious, but also because it contains part of its climactic 10 second bullet time-slice that gives Chase enough time to deflect a bullet with an ash tray.

The first 'bullet ride', meanwhile, in which the camera trails the path of a bullet up until the point of impact came in a night-club scene in *Ringo*





➤ Lam's 1992 Hong Kong actioner *Full Contact* (bit.ly/fullcontacttrailer). The film also starred a young Chow Yun Fat who would go on to make slow-motion gunplay his own through the astonishing films of John Woo, such as *A Better Tomorrow* (1986) and *Hard Boiled* (1992). It was these influences that would give rise to the gunplay of *Max Payne*, a title that was already in development when the movie that went on to secure bullet-time's noble place in the next decade of gaming was released, *The Matrix*.



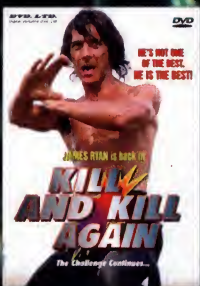
The Matrix's green-screen treatment of bullet-time was nothing of revolutionary yet, aside from the Woo-isms of Hong Kong cinema, there was another unlikely inspiration for the Wachowski brothers'

barnstormer, the opening credits of the '60s Japanese cartoon series *Speed Racer*.

The Wachowskis would go on to release a live-action version of *Speed Racer* in 2009, but in 1999 they were content take inspiration from the way each episode's opening contained a freeze-framed hero leaping from his car, while the camera circled around him by 180°. This bit of anime became the model for some of *The Matrix's* most iconic moments.

Other early cinematic uses of bullet-time could be found in movies like the original *Blade* (1998) and music videos such as Korn's *Freak on a Leash* (1998). But it was after *The Matrix* that slow-motion's use became truly ubiquitous in rip-offs, pastiches and gaming.

All these influences fed into one of the most ubiquitous of shooter mechanics of times to come. What will be known in common parlance as bullet-time until the end of civilization, now goes by multiple rubbish names in whatever shooter it remedies, or sometimes pollutes. The term 'bullet time' is trademarked by Warner Bros (prior to which it was owned by former *Max*



Payne pushes 3D Realms) so to avoid treading on toes many games have ploughed their own slow-motion furrow in terms of naming their wares.



A VIDEOGAMING BULLET-TIMELINE

A chronicle of 13 years of slow-motion shooting and explosions

MDK: a game about murder, death and killing.



1997

MDK

A forgotten feature of this masterpiece, the sequel of which is reportedly having a revamp in coming months, was that as you fired off sniper shots, three windows above your scope would 'bullet ride' the path your former shots were already taking. *MDK* was ahead of its time in more ways than could be counted, and its cheeky backpack-chute hasn't even been topped by *Just Cause 2*, so chalk up its window-in-window projectile-chasing as another sign of its unrepeated genius.



1999

UNREAL TOURNAMENT

Years later *Unreal Tournament 3* would introduce its brilliant (if never used by anyone) bubbles of slow-time. However, the original UT had a slo-mo feature hidden in its console when you played bots in its practice modes. Tapping in 'Slomo 0.1' had you moving through treacle, 'Slomo 0.8' placed you in a light syrup, 'Slomo 10' ramped the game up to the speed of light. Let's not forget the flyable Redeemer rounds, the bullet-ride to end them all.



1999

REQUIEM: AVENGING ANGEL

As an angel on a mission from God, one of your powers was to warp time or, in more common parlance, to slow it the hell down while you knocked seven bells out of the Fallen and broke up their wicked plan to launch a space craft that would in turn collide with heaven. Released in the shade of *Half-Life*, *Requiem* didn't set the tills on fire but it at least brought temporal trickery to the masses. Well, some of the masses.



2001 MAX PAYNE

This is where all the tricks of the trade coagulated into one big, brilliant tortured slow-motion glory shot. Few can forget the first moment they tapped the relevant key in the training level, the whooshing noise that heralded bullet-time, the half-spoken cry of, "It's Payne!", from the gangsters turning the street corner, and the glorious tracking of the bullets that would finish them off. In time mods would not only implant *Matrix*-style kung-fu moves but also the fateful Lobby scene that Max had been born to ape. A landmark in extreme gaming violence. Hurrah.



2002 JEDI OUTCAST

Sure Obi-Wan never danced around Vader in giddy circles, but that didn't stop Kyle Katarn from presenting himself with a dose of Force Speed whenever he wasn't using his powers to knock Stormtroopers off high ledges. At the time of *Jedi Outcast* the bullet-time train was really rolling, so full-on spinny slo-mo cameras were used when you offed lightsaber-wielding enemies, while more traditional world-slowng techniques could be enforced on your surroundings during more general combat.



2003 MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE

What better way to improve the un-subtle art of slow-motion than have all manner of on-screen paraphernalia and physics imbued bodies flying all over the shop? *Max Payne 2* was keen to impress, and so was heavy on situations in which, for example, someone left 30 plastic chairs sitting on an explosive crate. It turned out that flaming barrels and enemies precariously balancing on scaffolding made for even better bullet-time. Who knew?

"But it was after *The Matrix* that slow-motion's use became truly ubiquitous in rip-offs, pastiches and gaming"



A lobby, yesterday.
(Well, in 2003 really.)

2003 ENTER THE MATRIX

ENTER THE MATRIX

Unfortunately, the official *Matrix* game had the very worst implementation of bullet-time around. As you played through the game you could easily forget you had slow-motion chopsocky or bullet-dodges, as the bad enemy AI and your overpowered character rarely made it necessary to perform in the usual digital treacle. Compared to *Max Payne's* *Kung Fu* (moddb.com/mods/kung-fu-30) and an unofficial mod that recreated the simple joy of *The Matrix's* lobby sequence, the official game felt little more than lightweight fluff. The fact that *Enter the Matrix* was so up itself and devoid of fun would prove to be an indication of the way the whole franchise was going. Sometimes guns, lots of guns, are not enough.

BULLET-TIME QUIZ BONANZA!

Want to play? Simply link the correct game to the rubbish synonym for 'slow motion gameplay'. (Answers on page 59)

GAME	BULLET-TIME ALTERNO-WORD
JADE EMPIRE	ZED TIME
F.E.A.R.	MIRE
PAINKILLER	SLOW TIME
JOHN WOO'S STRANGLEHOLD	TEMPORAL DILATION
DOOM 3: RESURRECTION OF EVIL	CONCENTRATION MODE
MIRROR'S EDGE	ADRENALINE
CALL OF JUAREZ	HELLTIME
TIMESHIFT	REACTION TIME
WOLFENSTEIN	REFLEX TIME
KILLING FLOOR	HASTE
SINGULARITY	TEQUILA TIME
DARK MESSIAH OF MIGHT AND MAGIC	FOCUS TIME

"We are at a point at which slo-mo bullet-play is uncool"



2005

Zombies in hazard suits?
What will they think of next?

DOOM 3: RESURRECTION OF EVIL

By the time the *Doom 3* expansion pack rolled around, the bullet-time production line had become an efficient and ubiquitous industry. True to form, *Resurrection* appeared late to the party with both and performed with neither. Repackaged as *Helltime* (patent pending) it looked pretty, but added little to the game. A pattern that would be repeated in games for several years.



2005

F.E.A.R.

FEAR was the game where bullet-time jumped the shark. Here 'Reflex' time made a game a show-stopping must have. *FEAR*'s particle effects, flying sparks and the beautiful animation of your enemies' leaps and vaults were visceral in the extreme in slow-motion, while the ability to toss a grenade and then shoot it into combustion in mid-air was an unparalleled by-line in shooter history. Whenever you hear an enemy goon say, "Shiiiiit!", in a desperate low bass and try to run away, remember that *FEAR* did it first, and better.



2006

TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND

The quest for decent Lara-on-human combat remained unfulfilled with *Legend*'s odd mechanic of having Lara undertake graceful slow-motion leaps hither, thither and off the barrel-chests of her gun-toting foes. Things were only marginally better when the remake of the original *Tomb Raider*, *Anniversary*, appeared one year later, and that was only because you were leaping out of the way of a dinosaur. And dinosaurs are always cool. Still though, if there's one thing that's not needed in a *Tomb Raider* game it's slo-mo.



2007

CALL OF JUAREZ

That cowboys have rough edges is easy to believe, but that they had the ability to slow down time – as in *Call of Juarez* – just didn't meld with the Wild West action or setting. Techland repeated this mistake by letting Brother Ray keep this ability in the game's prequel, *Bound in Blood*. In recent times, on console, Rockstar has nailed Wild West slow-motion shootery with the DeadEye system in *Red Dead Redemption*, here Techland didn't come close.



2007

TIMESHIFT

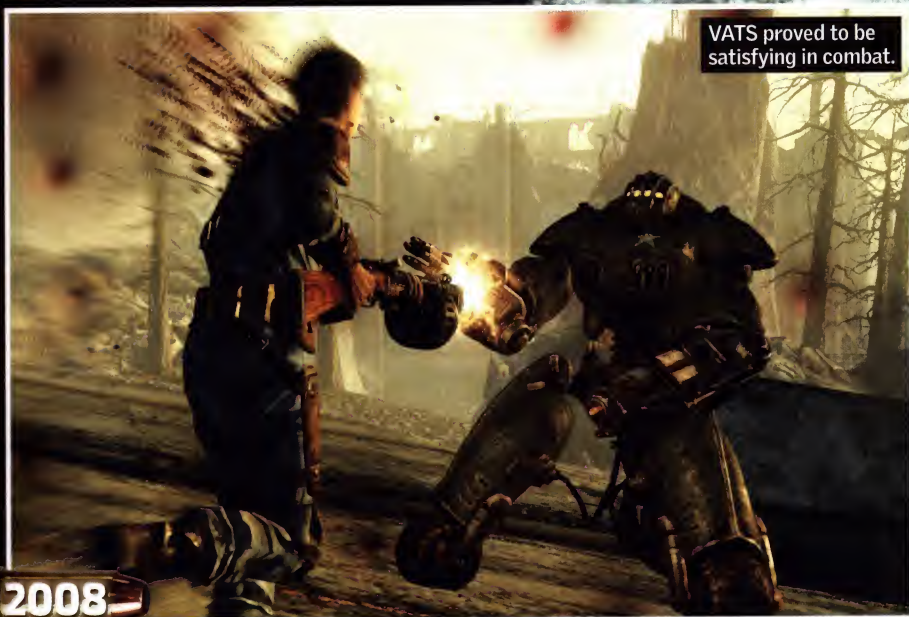
Proof that the attractive sheen of bullet-time had worn off in gaming circles, *TimeShift* was cruelly ignored. A tight, ferocious shooter that genuinely added new and interesting gameplay to an increasingly elderly concept. Freeze enemies and steal their guns, reverse time and watch the world unwrap around you... if it had been released a few years earlier it would have been dynamite. Please, please, please check the game out on *Steam*, it remains a hugely satisfying game to play.



2007

JOHN WOO'S STRANGLEHOD

Better on paper, and on console than on PCs, *Stranglehold* was nevertheless the bullet-time phenomenon coming full circle. The director who mastered the art of slo-mo combat and his iconic star, Chow Yun Fat, entered the realm of gaming with a game-only sequel to the masterpiece *Hard Boiled*. The physics and the sheer cinematic pizzazz of its bullets caught in motion were a joy, yet the rest of the game didn't do its cinematic predecessor justice.



VATS proved to be satisfying in combat.

2008

FALLOUT 3

Bullet-time had lost its halo by 2008, but its use in *Fallout 3* showed that in the right hands (and with a new implementation) it could be dynamite. You can't beat a little bit of the old ultra-violence, and the way VATS expressed itself was the slow-motion cherry on *Fallout 3*'s irradiated cake. From the muffled sounds as bullets, missiles and lobbed tin cans made as they flew through the air, all the way to the incredibly OTT decapitations and flying eyeballs, it was a satisfying spectacle. We expected it to unnecessarily slow the game down, but several thousand flying limbs later we're still entertained.



You'd think bullet-time Nazis would be great. They weren't.

2009

WOLFENSTEIN, WET, WANTED, F.E.A.R. 2

In recent years bullet-time has become less and less of a main feature in gaming and become more of a side-salad. 2009 was the year that proved the sensation you only get in real life when you're about to be hit by a bus a) isn't leaving gaming and b) is now largely attached to games that feel a bit old. *Wolfenstein* was ho-hum and dated, *Wet* was hung by its own repetitive slow-motion petard, and *Wanted* had bullet-spiralling moments of semi-joy but no bugger played it. As for *FEAR 2*, even one with such slavish dedication to Monolith products as I, couldn't help but admit that the game was good but the series needed new ideas, and quick. The lack of love for bullet-time in *FEAR 3* marketing shows that Warner Bros feel the same.



2010

SINGULARITY

Singularity lets you snipe heads in slow-motion, and also has exploding barrels and a gravity gun. A decent shooter, but a collation of every over-used FPS mechanic in the genre's history. FPS developers: new balls please.

THE FUTURE

When you look at recent and forthcoming shooters you realise that bullet-time is getting sequestered off into different weapons and set-pieces rather than as a hook to hang a game upon.

The allure of slow-motion gunplay is far less of a sales prompt in this day and age, and it's no mistake that the games being released with it loud, proud and up-front are those that have been in development for an aeon. Hollywood has moved away slightly from action-slow-motion action too, concentrating more on precision gunplay and the high adrenaline close-up bodyslams used by Bourne and neo-Bond.

As ever, perhaps not sadly in this case, games will follow Hollywood's suit. We are at the point at which slow-motion bullet-play is uncool. Then again, no-one is going to stop it actually being slightly fun anytime soon. It'll never truly go away, and we'll never stop feeling a secret degree of satisfaction when we pop a few heads under its influence.

There are only three constants in our lives, death, taxes and bullet-time. **PEZ**

BULLET-TIME QUIZ BONANZA ANSWERS

Jade Empire: Focus Time; F.E.A.R.: Reflex Time; Painkiller: Haste; John Woo's Stranglehold: Tequila Time; Doom 3: Resurrection of Evil; HellTime: Mirror's Edge; Reaction Time; Call of Juarez: Concentration Mode; TimeShift: Slow Time; Wolfenstein: Mire; Killing Floor: Zed Time; Singularity: Temporal Dilation; Dark Messiah of Might and Magic: Adrenalin



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PCZONE

Reviews

Our verdict on the latest PC games

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- ✓ To hang up on companies who say that 79% isn't a good score. What do they know?
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PCZONE Badges



CLASSIC (90%+)

Games scoring in this bracket are air-punching, heart-soaring triumphs. Buy them.



RECOMMENDED (75-89%)

Head-turning, if not eye-popping, games. But then, who wants their eyes popped?



DUMP (0-19%)

PCZONE's dirty protest. If a game is bad, we won't shirk our duty.



ON THE DVD

Good news! Check out the cover DVD for a playable demo or movie.



ONLINE ONLY

Don't have an internet connection? Then don't waste your time with this game: it won't work without one.



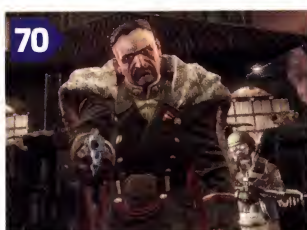
EXPANSION PACK

See this and you're going to have to get the original game first. We know, but life's not fair.



64 MAFIA II

Take trip back to a time when men were made and hats were cool



70

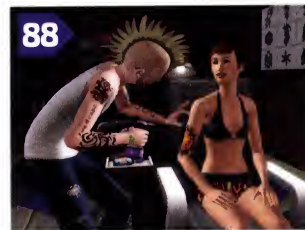
70 SINGULARITY

We play the shooter that gives the laws of physics, time and logic a mere nod as it chortles by.



80

80 MONKEY ISLAND 2 SPECIAL EDITION



88

88 THE SIMS 3: AMBITIONS

81 HEGEMONY: PHILIP OF MACEDON

89 SNIPER: GHOST WARRIOR

84 LEGO HARRY POTTER: YEARS 1-4

90 STATE OF PLAY: COUNTER-STRIKE SOURCE

86 DARKEST OF DAYS TOKI TORI

92 BUDGET

87 A FAREWELL TO DRAGONS

94 BUYER'S GUIDE

74 APB

This MMO promised us so much. So what exactly went so wrong? As it turns out, pretty much everything...

78 TRANSFORMERS: WAR OF CYBERTON

Everyone's favourite evil-as-in and good-as-Muppets robots go all co-op shooter.

The PCZONE Machine

As you'll see on the many pages of resplendent reviews that follow, we list the minimum specifications you need to play each game in each review. Please refer to the publisher's website to check out their recommended optimum specs that'll make the games super-whizzy. We review all new games on a variety of systems, including our top-spec, very desirable InterPro IPW-Ci7 (pictured right). For more info on InterPro, head down to the internet and type the following into your browser: ipworkstations.com.





The shotgun from that distance? Who is this joker?



MAFIA



Jon 'Log' Blyth loves to play with Tommy... Tommy gun that is

DEVELOPER 2K Czech
PUBLISHER 2K
WEBSITE mafia2game.com
ETA 26 August
PRICE £34.99

AT A GLANCE...

The sequel to Illusion's 2002 surprise hit. That was linear driver-shooter with superb damage modelling and excellent accents. So is this.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
2GHz Core 2 Duo or 2.4GHz Athlon X2, 2GB RAM, Nvidia 8400GS or ATI HD2400 graphics card. Windows Vista/7 with DirectX 10 required.

HOW IT STACKS

MAFIA 92%

GRANDTHEFT AUTO IV 91%

MAFIA II 80%

ILLUSION HAVE TAKEN seven years to develop this game. It started life being coded for the PC, Xbox, and PlayStation 2, before being transplanted into a completely new engine. That's a development cycle from another era, one of patience and money rivers. So, what were you expecting?

Fans of the first game, were you expecting a new story of an innocent, drawn reluctantly into the world of organised crime? *Mafia II* isn't such a kind creature. Sandbox fans, perhaps you were thinking that seven years in development would lead to an evolution of the first game, building on the original's linear structure to make a free-roaming speakeasy? Nope – there's no evolution there, either.

Mafia II is a faithful sequel. It's an extremely linear driver and shooter. Does that description lack ambition? Haven't our expectations been stretched beyond their elastic limit by a decade of "living, breathing cities"? Or can

Mafia II be described as the driver genre's *Modern Warfare 2*, in terms of outstanding linear set-pieces?

Hopefully, over the next couple of thousand words, I'll reach a conclusion. Because at this point, I'm still torn.

THE PERFECT SKY

The game starts with Vito, the lead character, narrating his early life. Born in 1925, his family moved from Sicily to Empire Bay, a town that's equally beautiful in its grand, zoomed-out sense of scale, and disgusting in its close-up detail. Vito notes, in a way that he seems to think is wry, "American Dream? It was more like an American nightmare". Outrageous cliché, yes, but then again "You're not in Kansas any more" featured prominently in the trailer for *Avatar*, and I was the only person in my row who make outraged sputters at that.

Generally, the dialogue is fine, and extremely well-acted, so I'll hold my tongue. Even if, at times, it feels like an

underscripted scene has had huge gaps inserted into the dialogue by an unsympathetic editor's scissors.

Young Vito makes friends with Joe Barbaro, and they begin a short-lived adventure of robbing jewellery shops – a habit that gets Vito arrested by one of those excellent '40s Irish New York coppers, and shipped off to fight in World War Two. Dispatched to his homeland of Sicily, he learns how to vault, crouch and throw grenades, and also gets his first taste of the power of the Mafia. Witnessing Don Calo's persuasive power over the troops, Vito isn't consumed with ambition – he just seems suitably impressed.

Vito is a very different person to the first game's Tommy Angelo. While Tommy was a taxi driver, drawn reluctantly into the Family, with scenes set aside for personal crises, Vito feels like he was born to this life.

When asked if he can kill without question or reason, there's no hesitation. When his





"Mafia II is a faithful sequel. It's an extremely linear driver and shooter"



Superb jewel technology.



New decade, new cars.



The buttock doctor prescribes gentle patting.

THE PEOPLE

The people you'll hug and backstab

JOE

A lifelong friend, Joe balances his optimistic attitude with a propensity for getting you into trouble. He goes on his own little journey, losing someone dear to him and initiating a Tarantino-esque farce in the local greaser bar. After that, he's never as sincerely cheeky.

LUCA

If there's one sure sign of a bad man, it's the pencil-thin moustache that Luca sports like a gay giant's eyebrow on his upper lip. He's a weasel of a bastard, who tries to charge you \$5,000 to join the Family. That's not how it works, apparently.

FRANCESCA

Your sister marries Eric while you're in prison, and in a world with very few women, it falls to her to be the damsel in distress. When you're not paying off debts, you're dealing with her abusive relationship. She's rarely grateful.

PAPALARDO

Union boss Papalardo is making the most of this time of plenty, by eating everything he can. He employed your father, and you get some work, too. Of course, it's never that simple, and if there's any videogame sign of evil even worse than a Sparks moustache, it's being a fatty fat-face.



➤ Early missions catch up with him, he takes to a spell in jail like an angry duck to bloody water.

The problem is, Vito never takes any real pleasure out of his actions, either. He might say he joined the Mafia for the money, respect and women, but he's never got that much money, he barely glances at the women in the strip clubs, and you never get the feeling he's got that much self-respect, either.

CITY OF DREAMS

Empire Bay has enough soul for two, though. It's not a big town, but over the opening chapters set in a '40s winter,

and the later episodes set in a leafy '50s summer, you feel like you're driving around two different towns.

Although, admittedly, two identical towns. Although there's no artificial lockdown in the city, there's also no real reason to explore.

There's a single mission thread that carries you through the story, and unfolds the areas in their own time. In fact, if you explore too much and you'll ruin the story's own unfurling of the city.

There are collectibles, in the form of women's tits. These bosoms are strewn throughout the missions in the form of *Playboy* covers. When you pick one up, these covers flash up immediately, so you can get gunfights interrupt by a pair of swivelling hypnoboobs. It's an odd decision to make these ladies, delightful as they are, flash up in the middle of



Tiny shopkeeper, climb inside my hat.

missions. It's inconsiderate, really. Put them away, ladies. In a menu, somewhere the randy tykes can hunt them down.

Driving, as you'd expect from the former Illusion Software, is great. My personal preference was to flip between gamepad for driving and mouse and keys for combat, but whatever you use, you'll find the cars zippier than the first game. They take a while to get to full speed, but once they're there, you're almost guaranteed to die when you finally hit something. And thanks to

a slightly unforgiving checkpoint system, this could easily throw you back to a point before your last combat mission. So plan your driving trips sensibly, or use the speed limiter. This will also prevent the police from sniffing around your exhaust pipe.

HOT RODDING

Controlling the cars is a pleasure – the handbrake has been tuned to help you drift into corners and U-turn, rather than making you oil up and wrestle a gyroscope in zero-G. Token *Grand*



It's only his second day in prison, too.



All the emotion of a Jonny Cab.



They really didn't want to share their whiskey.



Shooting the floor isn't the most efficient way of digging.

Theft Auto IV bitch out of the way, the collection of cars is great, too – all timely models that damage so gently that you'll try to take care of them. In fact, with guns and ammo being so easy to come by, this is really all you've got to spend your money on – tuning up the car, fixing the damage, and adding a filthy number plate. But this isn't a game about accruing a personal fortune – it's a game about the unstable fortunes of a risk-taking criminal. Spend it as you get it.

yes fantasy of *Baby It's Cold Outside* – the music adds more character to the city than the scripted arguments and serenades going on in the back streets.

The storyline isn't moralistic, but it does carry a message, if you're going to live a life where you forego friends and family for the Family, you shouldn't be too surprised when you lose your friends and family.

The missions you take part in are a mixed bag – *Mafia II* is a fairly short game, so there's little repetition within

"It's a fairly short game, so there's little repetition within the 15 chapters"

In an extremely welcome touch, songs are debuted at scripted moments, then added to the playlist of the three radio stations. The song list isn't massive, but it's an outstanding collection: hearing the Andrews Sisters talking about "working for the Yankee dollar", getting told to *Straighten Up & Fly Right* by the King Cole Trio, or simply listening to the oppressive no-means-

the 15 chapters, but it's all familiar stuff. Tailing cars without getting too close, intercepting a car, and escaping cops – it's all driving game staples. The driving conversations are good. Occasionally they're great, but frequently, they're just, plain good. Joe's list of chat-up lines is a poor cousin to those of Niko Bellic's cousin, yet later on, as the game reaches a peak, you finally warm to the amoral bastards you're working with.

Combat lets you try stealth occasionally, without demanding it of you. When you fight in a group, your colleagues have the slightly imbalancing knack of being both good fighters and nigh invincible. Joe will pass regular comments – during any one fight he'll probably say "You shoot like my sister" and "I wouldn't like to be on your wrong side" around five times each.

WEAPON OF JOYCE

The weapons, meanwhile, are superbly tactile and effective. The basic pistol and revolver,



HINDSIGHT ACADEMY

The meta-conversations of the '50s

The city of Empire Bay is a quiet place. Everything you do is reported immediately on the radio as a breaking news story. This is a shame, because it breaks the illusion that the city is there to do anything but remind you how important you are. But beyond that, the radio shows and conversations you overhear have the occasional knowing flavour...



1. THE CLASSIC VIDEOGAME MOMENT

The security guards in the town hall are visionaries. They're having a conversation about cartoons, and what it'd be like to control them. "You'd probably need a box," comments one of the guards. Congratulations, *Mafia II*'s "I am in a game!" moment.

2. INVENTIONS

Answering machines, drive-through restaurants, and miraculously "untethered" remote controls for TVs – all these things are reported with of-the-time observational comedy by Rockin' Ricky Fox. "Now I won't have any excuse not to answer my main squeeze's calls," he chuckles. "Just kidding, babe, I love you." Lazlow Jones, he ain't.

3. VOICE ACTING

It's a game that confident in its own acting skill that makes odd jokes about it. In the slaughterhouse, two abattoir workers talk about other lines of work. "I might be a voice actor," says one. "You?" replies the other, creating a tense fold in time-space that forms the basis of the next series of *Doctor Who*.





The sharp hair, the greasy suits.



The 45° tilt – a rare human feat.



Browse the store

Another jacket please, I've shot someone again.

"At times, *Mafia II* all comes together, and these moments stick with you"

↳ the precision and power of the Magnum, the knockback and drop down of the shotgun, and the inefficient spray of the Tommy gun. Rarely for a game like this, each one became a favourite in its own way, and I'd happily cycle through my weapons to try out a new sound effect, kickback and efficiency.

At times, *Mafia II* all comes together perfectly, and these moments that stick with you. Shooting up a greaser bar in a revenge attack. Dealing with your drunken, vomiting friends in the car

when you realise there's urgent and unsavoury unfinished business in the trunk. Then driving home with them singing hopelessly out of key. The aftermath of Joe's tragedy in the local bar. These moments have genuine comedy and warmth, and they carry you through the less warm aspects of the game's characterisation.

For a game that trades so strongly on its people, there are perhaps too many to truly care about. You come across crooked Union boss, Papalardo,



MONTAGE ON THE RUN

The lighter side of...

Some of the most bizarrely laugh-out-loud moments in *Mafia II* are when 2K Czech decide to show the passage of time in montages.

There's one, just after you and Joe become Made Men, which is a stroke of uncomfortable and dramatically ineffective brilliance – grown men buying suits together, cheerfully brutalising people, and extorting protection money from terrified bakers. It's just one of the ways in which the developers' humour shines through, in a story which otherwise charts one man's passage into a friendless world of lost loyalty.



GIRLS HAVE BOOBS

If you're going to have a moral reaction to cheap titillation, it's always best to undermine your outrage with pictures like this.



This is some brazen lawbreaking.

early on. And you're expected to suddenly care when he turns up at the end with a shocking revelation.

The fact you're not really given any important choices – there isn't a single truly branching event in the game, and only one ending – mean that you resent, more than experience, your betrayals. I'm not trying to blame 2K Czech for the limitations of gaming in general, but giving a player decisions gets them involved in what's going on. That's gaming's advantage as entertainment.

2K Czech clearly have a story they want to tell, so this power is used instead in a number of subtle and throwaway moments. For all their triviality, they're instantly appealing. For instance, when your drunken passenger says he's going to be sick, do you stop to let him out? When you report back on your mission which took you through an abattoir and a sewer, will you stop off to buy a change of clothes? Will you notice the mission that pays homage to the original *Mafia*? Details like this distinguish *Mafia II* as a game that you could actually love, rather than play, but with seven years in the pipeline, there should have been more.

Mafia II is 10 hours of driving, story, and extremely competent gun action. Running at top specs, it looks stunning,

and if there was a soundtrack album, I'd buy myself a copy.

MIXED TIMES

If this review read harshly at times, that's because this is a game that could've scored in the 90s – that's the curse of high expectations. So let's leave this on a well-deserved upbeat note: for 10 hours playing *Mafia II*, I never had a bored moment (a couple of frustrated moments, maybe): there were some laugh-out-loud moments; betrayals that stung, others that didn't; I lost my family; settled forgotten scores, and used a whole bunch of contextually-appropriate racist and sexist language. I had a great time, all things considered, but it would've been more satisfying to have felt like I was a part of a story. **PCZ**

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Slick, smooth, sweet
SOUND Perfect music and effects
MULTIPLAYER Not a whiff

- ✓ Great cars
- ✓ Great guns
- ✓ Great acting
- ✓ Good script
- ✗ Cold characters
- ✗ Extremely linear

80

Not Refuse

Look at the law-abiding ants.



The working title was Ghost Fondler.



Tough to head butt when the head swings around.



SINGULARITY

Jon 'Log' Blyth isn't slow – he's close to an event horizon

DEVELOPER Raven
PUBLISHER Activision
WEBSITE singularity-game.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £35

AT A GLANCE...

A shooter that borrows from everywhere, yet is very entertaining.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
2.8GHz dual core CPU, 1GB RAM
(2GB for Vista/7), 256MB NVIDIA
8800 GT or ATI Radeon X1800.
Integrated video not supported.

HOW IT STACKS

FEAR 2: PROJECT ORIGIN 80%

SINGULARITY 79%

TIMESHIFT 78%

SOPHISTICATED PEOPLE LIKE you and me are immune to hype. Perhaps immune is the wrong word; we're prone to notice the difference between information and hype, mulishly hardening ourselves to the product being fingered into our mouths. If you're so cool, we think, we'll see that for ourselves.

Unfortunately for us, and happily for the manipulative scum that forms the nation's ranks of marketeers and advertisers, we'll probably end up buying the mush anyway, just so we can bitch about it in on the internet with a more educated sense of resentment.

The complete absence of hype, however, is slightly more puzzling. Are

we supposed to like it? Feel like it's a rare discovery? Rescue it from its neglectful tormenters? *Singularity* had a short burst of publicity, but that was over a year ago. Since then, Activision has been silent about its time-bending shooter. No review copies were sent out. There were no visits to the office from an Activision public relations lady using words like "unique" while the hypnotic Activision giraffe looked in through our third-floor window.

IGNORED...

Poor Raven – *Singularity* doesn't deserve this level of brutal neglect. That's not saying this is a masterpiece, but slipping an original title so far under the radar implies an inappropriate level of disinterest and embarrassment. So, *Singularity*. The game in which you, Nate Renko, visit

Katorga-12, a Russian island that was the home to many peculiar experiments in the '50s. After your helicopter is brought down by a massive crackling explosion, you return to consciousness in the flaming ruins of the island complex's welcome foyer.

This is the place where scientists brought their families to work on Element 99, a time-deforming isotope that Kruschev hoped would give Russia the upper hand in the Cold War. The experiments failed, and no advantage was gained. But they did build an odd bridge between 1950 and 2010, one that slings you unwittingly into the time of the original explosions that ended the '50s experiments. Being a hero, you decide to help people out.

Unfortunately, the guy you carry to safety is one of those people who died for a reason. His life creates a new, and substantially crappier, timeline in which Element 99 is harnessed, Mother Russia



Humans: our limbs come off so easily!

"Slipping an original title so far under the radar implies an inappropriate level of embarrassment"



TEAM HAMMER

The effort and thought that's gone into *Singularity's* multiplayer is just another reason why Raven must be wondering why they bothered. Instead of taking the easy and boring route of limiting you to playing opposing teams of US and Russian soldiers, in *Soldiers vs Creatures* you fight player-controlled mutants. And not just the workmanlike Zek, you play the explosive, wall-climbing Phase Ticks; the lumbering, base-defending organic masses called the Radion; and Tank-like Reverts. Each has special powers, whether it's possessing enemies (Tick), phasing out (Zek), planting proximity mines (Revert) or firing a huge laser beam (Radion). This is a great bit of asymmetrical gameplay, and it knocks the game into the Recommended bracket.

Now that's what we call a party.

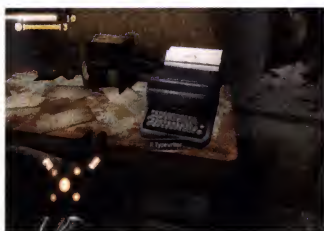
INTERACTIVITY '94

You can click R on some pretty pointless things



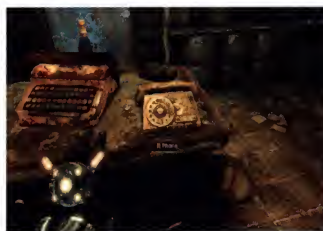
BELLS

Press R on a bell. It dings! But watch out, that noise might summon a bell-loving monster? Does it? No! It just dings!



TYPEWRITERS

Now tap R on a typewriter! It could be a retro save-game mechanism, like *Resident Evil*. What happens? It just pings!



TELEPHONE

Surely the phones aren't still connected, 60 years on? That'd make no sense. But they are! And they go bring!



POLAROID

Actually, this is a good one, and one of the game's funnier and more startling moments. Kudos to everyone at Raven!

dominates the world, and Krushev is deposed by someone ever so slightly more evil. Suddenly, it's your job, with the help of the original E-99 scientist and a group called Mir-12, to reinstate the original timeline.

Don't ask too many questions. Don't ask how Mir-12 are aware of any branching timeline. Don't ask why people in the feverishly oppressive atmosphere of Communist Russia are so keen to record their treacherous thoughts on audio cassettes. Don't ask why the artistic style seems to owe less to more classically Russian styles such as Constructivism, and more to *BioShock* and *Jurassic Park*'s Mr DNA.

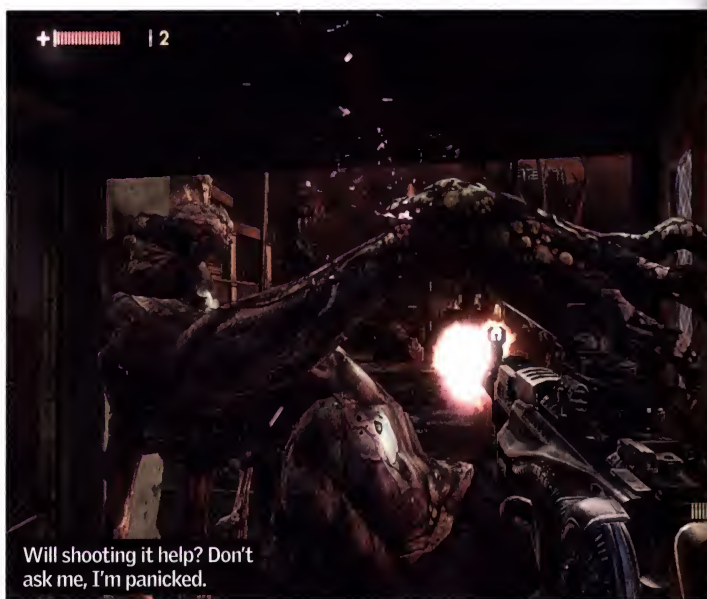
Let's get this out of the way: There are a lot of ways in which *Singularity* is derivative. Numerous elements of the game will remind you, variously, of *BioShock*, *TimeShift*, *FEAR 2*, and *Prey*. And I'm not just name-dropping a few shooters to create a spurious sense of knowing what I'm talking about, I'm trying to hedge around spoilers, even if they are spoilers you've already seen in different games. There are times

throughout *Singularity* where you'll notice what a patchwork quilt of influences and maggied ideas it is. But here's the important thing – you'll enjoy yourself anyway.

...YET LOVED

But let's switch and get complimentary. There's a streak of well-concealed originality running through Raven's half-buried game. The time-manipulation device allows you to age and renew items that have been imbued with Element 99. Again, dull your scientific mind, as this is a gameplay and expositional device that doesn't stand up to the gentlest of scrutiny. So don't ask why heavily mutated boss creatures don't have any E-99 in them, or why people appeared to write on blackboards using nature's most valuable and volatile element.

Just know that your glove can be used to decay your enemies' cover to rubble, and crumple and uncrumple crates in ways that are surprisingly useful, both from a puzzle platforming perspective, and a strategic angle.



Explosive barrels can be rendered harmless by the passage of time, then re-activated with the glove and shot from a safe distance. Playing around with the glove is far from sandbox gameplay – the objects you can use with it are too limited for that – but it has enough uses to surprise you.

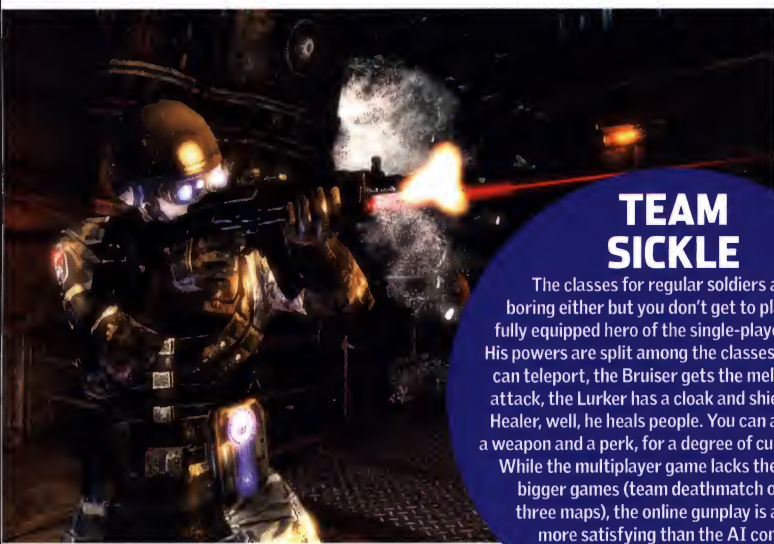
There are stands throughout the game that can upgrade your magical time glove. The first allows it to act like a gravity gun, perhaps because someone at Raven realised they hadn't nicked anything from *Half-Life* yet.

The second upgrade lets you create deadlocks – stasis bubbles that you can throw between yourself and an enemy to slow bullets. It's a balanced talent, you're not invincible as bullets still move, but when you're surrounded by skittering explosive plants from *Prey*, it's the ultimate defence.

Combat has a similarly tactical feel – use the wrong weapon, and you'll take heavy damage. The assault rifle – usually an FPS staple – is flaccid against anything other than human enemies; whilst the shotgun leaves you untouchable when you're fighting the stumpy, phase-shifting Zeks.

The problem is lack of that intangible feeling of connecting with the weapons. It could be something as simple as the guns' sound effects or their recoil, but some, the assault rifle in particular, feel thin and ineffective.

But then, there are the great weapons such as the hold-down-to-charge spikeshot, and the E-99 guided bullet that lets you steer it around corners. (How does time steer a bullet? You're asking questions again, stop it.) The game keeps you moving, keeps adding new elements, so that, while it's never truly original, *Singularity* never gets dull. If there's one thing *Half-Life 2* taught the world, it's that normally sane people will form loving relationships



TEAM SICKLE

The classes for regular soldiers aren't boring either but you don't get to play as the fully equipped hero of the single-player mission. His powers are split among the classes: the Blitzzer can teleport, the Bruiser gets the melee impulse attack, the Lurker has a cloak and shield, and the Healer, well, he heals people. You can also choose a weapon and a perk, for a degree of customisation. While the multiplayer game lacks the depth of bigger games (team deathmatch only has three maps), the online gunplay is actually more satisfying than the AI combat of the story.



We're all thinking it.
I don't have to say it.

with imaginary women, as long as you create a paper-thin illusion of intelligence. *Singularity* gives it a whirl: Kathryn is your friend in Mir-12, the resistance group that's grown up to think of you, Renko, as the man who appeared from the future in '50 and will come back to fix things in 2010.

WAS A CONTENDER

Exposition takes place through a long chain of notes, audio logs, temporal hallucinations and film projectors. You can't pick up the tape recorders, so if you want the full backstory you'll have to hang around and listen to them, but they're not generally interesting enough to bother. There's only so many times you can hear someone saying, "I'm not sure what we're doing here is right. I don't feel well. Oh shit, a monster."

The hallucinations are well done, even if they do amount to unskippable cutscenes, but some of the notes are hilariously bad. "Something got into the TELEPORTATION research lab," goes one. "We can't work out how it got in though. All the doors were locked to the TELEPORTATION research lab." Can you decode the mystery? You



Give him a big hand.

probably can, I mean, the creatures have been teleporting around you for the last three hours.

The range of bad guys is grim, but slim. There's the lunging, squat, phasing guys, and the annoying, tall lurchers with detachable arms, whose heads flap around so much you waste less bullets shooting their chest. Element 99 affects plant life, too, creating underground caverns of glistening meaty bulbs that slurp out a barrage of explosive ticks. Top tip: you can age the plants, and they won't birth a tick like they do when you shoot them. The problem is, you always know when you can use it because of the unsubtle indicators, so you rarely get the satisfaction of solving a puzzle.

Singularity really does have its moments. The best comparison is to *TimeShift* (issue 189, 78%) that's pretty



Oi mate, I saved your
life 60 years ago.

enjoyable despite never punching you in the guts. Lower your expectations of videogame storytelling, and you're in for a miniature treat.

Sadly, though, I wish *Singularity* was better. I wish I could beat my chest at the fashionable villains of Activision, who cruelly buried this new franchise from the people who brought us PC classics like *Hexen*, *Heretic* and, erm, the *Wolfenstein* reboot. But their decision makes business and psychological sense. If *Singularity* had been projected onto the moon and touted as some world-changing beast, it could become somewhat disappointing. As it stands, *Singularity* will be seen as a game that's surprisingly good. Or at least, not as bad as you'd think. So let the slow-burning word of mouth campaign begin. **PCZ**

**"Somehow the game,
as a whole, comes
together beautifully"**

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Great – for 2006
SOUND Screaming, roaring, growling
MULTIPLAYER Online deathmatch and mutant play

- ✓ Great multiplayer
- ✓ Recent story
- ✗ Weak storytelling
- ✗ Criminally underpromoted

79
Badly treated

Scarily amusing or
amusingly scary?

APB

"This is one game," said *Paul Presley* taking off his sunglasses, "that got all too real." YEEEEAAHHHHHH!

ONLINE
ONLY

DEVELOPER Realtime Worlds
PUBLISHER EA
WEBSITE apb.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99 (plus game time)

AT A GLANCE...

Cops and Robbers on a grand online scale but a lack of decent combat.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
2.6GHz processor, 2GB RAM and
a 256MB graphics card. Constant
internet connection required.

HOW IT STACKS

TEAM FORTRESS 2 **93%**

GRAND THEFT
AUTO IV **91%**

APB **63%**

THERE'S BEEN SO much negativity heaped towards *APB* since its launch from the gaming media, that you can't help but feel sorry for both the game and the team behind it at Realtime Worlds.

In many ways, having had a little longer to spend with this attempt to marry the persistence of online shooters with the anarchy of a *Grand Theft Auto*-style environment, I'm perhaps in a position to highlight more of the games positives than merely lay out the many flaws alluded to everywhere else.

Unfortunately, that would involve being able to identify those positives and sadly, *APB* seems to stumble over its feet every time it tries to take a step forward. This was a game of immense opportunity. Realtime Worlds talked an incredibly good fight prior to the open beta and, to be fair *APB* does everything they said it would. The downside is that none of those things really seem to work. At all.

Let's start with what *APB* actually is, as there have been an awful lot of preconceived notions making their way into much of *APB*'s negative coverage.

Much of that comes down to people being sold a notion of playing an open-world, massively multiplayer GTA – something *APB* isn't really attempting to simulate at any greater level than simply being set in a city and focusing on the cops and robbers therein. Beyond that, there's nothing of *GTA*'s rich depth, satirical mind-set, or legendary characterisation and story. Nor is there meant to be.

APB is essentially attempting to be nothing more than a modern-generation, team-based online shooter with the

"It's about using tactics from Dick Dastardly's modified Highway Code"

Hey, a cop can have fun from time to time, right?



The Magnificent Seven ride again (with three mates).



How could he have missed?



SIGN HERE

Your chance to get all Banksy

Symbols are how you leave your mark on the world (although mostly on your T-shirts and car hoods). This interface is a simplified *Photoshop* essentially, with layers, effects and masks being used to create a surprising lack of cocks and balls to date. Come on gamers, pull your fingers out.

bonus of having each match taking place in a semi-persistent world that sees other teams fighting each other at the same time.

Players roll (and, indeed, role) as either a cop (Enforcer) or criminal, create an eerily lifelike avatar thanks to the astonishingly good character creator, then take to one of two 'Action zones', either to cause trouble or to prevent it.

Every mission you take has the potential to be a two-sided affair and you'll rapidly find yourself being matched against players from the opposing faction every time you hit the streets. You'll see plenty of other players roaming the streets, but unless the game has paired you against each other, you won't be able to interact with them, save for rare occasions when a player becomes so

powerful he becomes an open target to all the other players.

The other side to the game is the social district – a non-combat area in which all the customisation aspects come to the fore. You can spend as long as you like tweaking everything about your character here (it's the side of the game that you don't have to pay to play), from the designs of the clothing, to the paint job on the car, to the five second musical ditty that plays should you ever be lucky enough to kill another player.

Everything you create can be sold in-game to other players, and should you be a particularly lucrative designer, you could find yourself funding your game time this way,

eschewing the need for a regular real-world subscription.

ROOKIE COP

In some ways *APB* hearkens back to games like *PlanetSide* and *Counter-Strike*: an attempt to cross the adrenaline rush of the latter with the open-world, multiple skirmish sandbox possibilities of the former. When you look at *APB* in that light, it actually sounds like the game.

What lets it all down is that it doesn't get any of the core requirements to make such a hybrid beast work right: the combat, the vehicular play, the difficulty curve, none of it does the necessary job of making *APB* an enjoyable affair.

Things often feels as though *Realtime Worlds*, in their haste to make abundantly clear to any and everybody that *APB* is most definitely not an MMO no sireebob, have thrown away all of the fundamental building blocks that any online progression-based game needs to contain to provide a solid, enticing and addicting experience.

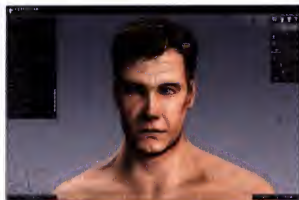
There's a reason, for instance, that newbies don't go on high-level raids with brand-new characters – they'd die within seconds. Yet a matchmaking system that routinely paired my lone Rank 20 Enforcer against a three or four-man gang of Rank 200+ crims is doing exactly that.



As you level up, more decals and decoration options become available.

ROLL CALL

The customisation is *APB*'s strongest suit; and one of the few positives the game has. It's scary how detailed it can get. Characters, clothes, cars, tattoos, decorations, theme tunes – you name it. By way of example, here are three people what I did make:



MOORE BOND

Why look everyone, it's the lightweight James Bond himself, Roger Moore circa *Man With The Golden Gun*! Sort of. In fact it's more like the priest from the remake of *V*.



ANY IDEA?

Now this guy we all recognise – it's whotsiface from that US crime TV show. You know, old moustache chops. (I couldn't remember who this looks like but it's someone from a film I saw.)



ESSEX LASS

Introducing Skanarella, the crack whore single mother with a heart of gold. As portrayed in the upcoming episode of *Panorama* I saw clip of by Dame Judy Dench in a wig.



Seriously, car seat manufacturers might as well not bother.



See? Cool.



APB gives new players no scope to learn the game's requirements, although they'll quickly learn how respawning works given it's how they'll spend most of their time. Something as simple as tiered servers would be a godsend for players.

As would a decent cover system, or character classes, or indeed any nod towards the myriad advances that shooters have made over the recent years, advances that enrich the experience of firing guns at people and having them fire back.

APB's promo videos all show in-game characters engaging in tense stand-offs, taking cover behind rows of cars and

making use of tactical nous to win through. *APB*'s actual fire fights work nothing like this, instead calling back to the very early days of *Quake II*-style gunplay, cops and robbers bunny hopping everywhere and teams all behaving like individuals running their way towards a pointless, unskippable slaughter.

Team play is supposed to be *APB*'s trump card (the amount of work gone into the game's voice comms systems is superb), but unless you're part of an established clan and can devote your

waking hours to training with them to be competitive, no-one communicates with you. I've been playing for weeks with an open mic and a desire to be told where to go, and at most two players have spoken to me, one just to call me a "retard", because we happened to lose a match. The intention by Realtime Worlds is noble, but the reality of gamers' natures is sadly lacking.

Casual players (those that don't spend 50 hours a day playing the game) need to be catered for with NPC missions, low-

level geared play and a feeling that they might just have a chance to survive more than five minutes. Without those key aspects, anyone new to the game will take a quick look, spend 40 minutes being consistently shot to shreds by any opponent they meet, get thoroughly bored of the woefully under-developed solo missions, log off and never return.

This is perhaps the biggest flaw about *APB* that needs to be addressed, the solo play is terrible. It delivers no impetus when what it needs to do is offer a sanitised, but no less exciting version of group play. Realtime Worlds needs to implement decent single-player content to allow novice players a chance to start

"At most two players have spoken to me, one just to call me a 'retard'"

The first meeting of the Raoul Moat Appreciation Society.

"The only thing that can save *APB* at this point is a radical rethink of the game's core structure"



Surprisingly, some role-playing clans are forming.



levelling up. And by decent, I mean more than the standard "drive, stop, press 'f', repeat" tedium that's currently there.

Pitch up against NPC crims/cops, offer a chance to practice your shooting skills, learn how to use the terrain and your equipment to it's best ability. Everything that any decent shooter teaches you as you play.

Which is a crying shame because had *APB*'s on-paper game been anywhere close to the reality, it would have been a superb title that set new standards in what online persistent shooters could achieve. It's full of ideas. Good ideas. Ideas that should have made this the game we all expected it to be.

We could live without the fact that the world doesn't have *GTA*-like depth if we felt as though it offered visceral thrills that engaged us. But every time you find yourself having fun with the game, it's in spite of the way it works, not because of it (a car on fire flying over your head will always be cool regardless of whether it drives well or not).

ROOKIE COP

APB isn't beyond repair. Successful MMOs have evolved hits through years of constant alterations and amendments. *World of Warcraft* and *EVE Online* are two that are barely recognisable from their origins. But *APB* doesn't have years to develop itself.

On its release Realtime Worlds were defiant about the complaints from

players and critics, almost as if they didn't care what anyone else thought of the game, because they were happy with it. But after the huge amount of negative feedback *APB* has received Realtime has said they're going to make changes to the game to improve the combat.

This'll likely be insufficient, as the game's flaws are at a fundamental level. Murmurs of free-for-all 'chaos' servers won't fix anything.

The only thing that can save *APB* at this point is a radical rethink of the game's core structure. *APB* is bursting with ideas and it could so easily have been wonderful. What its developers have to do is deliver a game that lives up to those ideas. The framework's there, as is the potential audience. What happens next is up to Realtime Worlds. **PCZ**

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Superb on power PC
SOUND Music stations and theme tunes
MULTIPLAYER Anti-newbie

- ✓ Best character builder
- ✓ Many ideas
- ✗ Failed to be great
- ✗ Horribly unbalanced
- ✗ Unengaging combat

63

Style over substance



Easiest episode of *Through the Keyhole* ever.

TRANSFORMERS: WAR FOR CYBERTRON



Jon Blyth was driving along a country road when he turned into a field

DEVELOPER High Moon Studios
PUBLISHER Activision
WEBSITE transformersgame.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99

AT A GLANCE...

Vehicular robot action set on the Transformers' home world. A little bit of history for fans of the shape-shifting robots.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
Core 2 Duo E4300 1.8GHz processor,
2GB RAM, and a GeForce 7900 GT or
Radeon X1900 graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

BATMAN: ARKHAM
ASYLUM 89%

TRANSFORMERS: WAR
FOR CYBERTRON 76%

TRANSFORMERS:
THE GAME 61%

THIS, THE LATEST game with *Transformers* in it, is dumb fun for one great reason: unlike their metal homeland, *Transformers* have no shades of grey. The Autobot and Decepticon moral outlook is so simple, there's not even a chance of having a good Nazi character.

Head evil dude Megatron is a complete and unapologetic dick, from the first Decepticon mission to the last. 'Decepticon' is actually too subtle a name for these aggro-douche warriors. They should just be done with it and call themselves 'Team Bastards'. If people die, that's because they are weak. They're all Drago from *Rocky IV*: "If he dies, he dies." Boo!

Meanwhile, the Autobots are the very spirit of *Sesame Street*. Go, us! Hurray for teamwork! You can do it, all you have to do is be as amazing as you can be!

Even better, freed from movie plots and Hollywood's incompatible schedule, but still with authentic voice talent like Peter Cullen as Optimus, this is a *Transformers* game as it was meant

to be. In terms of actual quality against most hopeful estimate it's another *Arkham Asylum*. Which isn't as great a compliment as it sounds, if you know how low my expectations were.

NEW OLD WORLD

War for Cybertron's story takes us into a new time and place, there's no stomping around Earth cities and looking behind office buildings for collectibles. We're on Cybertron, the long-ago planet-bot home of the Transformers. This game is set long before the time '80s cartoon kids will be familiar with, and even longer before that weird *Beast Wars* era from the

'90s – Optimus hasn't even been promoted to Prime in this.

The first missions are the Decepticon campaign, where Megatron begins his personal mission to harness the power of Dark Energon and dominate his home world. This is a self-destructive path that'll lead to Cybertron becoming uninhabitable. Starscream is keen to point this flaw out but, as we said, Megatron's a stubborn prick.

The game itself is an ambitious three-player co-op third-person shooter. And if you can get a third person to play the three-player co-op from the moderately populated lobby, it all comes together pretty well. There's not so

You'll have to make the transforming sound yourself.





MY, YOU'RE FAMILIAR

On the Decepticon team is Brawl, a soldier with a whirlwind melee attack. Later on, he'll unlock dash. Barricade is the team Scout, with a knockdown attack called shockwave and a shield. Finally, there's Megatron – the evil sod whose special power is to hover around and drain your energy like some kind of antigravity vampire. There's similar stuff with the Autobots: Bumblebee has shockwave and dash, just like Brawl and Barricade. Ratchet can set up a sentry gun and a shield, and that sharp-jawed heroic beauty Optimus can buff his mates with a Warcry. These classes are limited, but add a bit of customised fun where there might have been none.

"Going solo is the worst way to play *War for Cybertron*, even when using the sensible co-op AI"

much in the way of combining forces to solve puzzles, but combat is always more fun with a mate yelling in your ear.

The transforming aspect isn't what you might expect, the red lorries and yellow VW Beetles were an affectation Autobots used conceal themselves on Earth. On their home world, Optimus is a kind of underwhelming hovercraft, and Megatron, well, he's a kind of hovercraft too. It makes sense, given the surroundings. You're not driving around human roads, you're navigating

the inside of a robotic planet. The Decepticons aren't fighter jets and leisure cars, they're strafing combat machines. That said, you still get a fundamentally snazzy feeling when you try a hip-shattering mid-air transform.

MATES REQUIRED

Going solo is the worst way to play *War for Cybertron*, even when using the sensible co-op AI. So if you're a loner, play *Singularity* instead. The mini-boss enemies, for example, with glowing weak spots on their back, are enjoyable to take out with friends; but when your AI companions are distracting him, leaving you to casually melee his spine and take the glory effortlessly, it's all a bit of a let-down.

Halfway through, the game morphs into the Autobot campaign. On the streets of Iacon, you'll take car form

and drive around. It feels more open and, because it takes the bit of experience you got in the evil campaign for granted, you're in the thick of action much faster. It's supposed to feel better to be good, even if you do have to put up with a constant stream of encouragement, modesty and heroic chat. Wisely, you can start at the beginning of either campaign.

There are no pistols here. Every weapon's powerful, but each has its own drawback. Slow bullets, short range, low clip capacities, and an all-round paucity of ammo forces you to rely on your friends and engage in the odd bit of sneaky melee under the cover of your co-op fire. The combat feels full-on, nowhere more so than in the strong Escalation co-op mode.

War For Cybertron is a surprisingly strong game that does everything by the book. While it won't get any awards for originality, or for going too far beyond the call of duty, there should be a tiny medal for making a decent *Transformers* game, at last. **PCZ**

Never trust a man with a tiny face.

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Puts grey into great
SOUND Pchuh khu kook
MULTIPLAYER 3-player co-op

- ✓ No stupid Humans
- ✓ Good vs evil = good
- ✓ Escalation mode excellent...
- ✗ ...but short-term fun
- ✗ Vehicles could be faster
- ✗ Classes aren't that distinct

76

Changing fortunes





MONKEY ISLAND 2 SE: LECHUCK'S REVENGE

David Brown polishes his rock 'n' roll collector's plate

DEVELOPER LucasArts
PUBLISHER LucasArts
WEBSITE lucasarts.com/games/monkeyisland2
ETA Out now
PRICE £6.99



AT A GLANCE...

Arguably the best adventure game of all time gets the graphical and audio makeover treatment.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
3GHz processor, 256MB RAM (512MB Vista), and a 128MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

MONKEY ISLAND 2 SPECIAL EDITION 92%
THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND: SPECIAL EDITION 91%
JACK KEANE 73%

IF YOU'VE NEVER experienced this game before, it's important for you to understand *Monkey Island 2*'s place in PC gaming history. To experience *Monkey Island 2* in a new guise, and to remember puzzles and jokes long forgotten, is a glorious thing for any veteran of the early '90s.

The quality of the original has been documented more times than anyone can recall, so we won't waste too much time discussing its core. For newcomers, our hero, Guybrush, is regaling all and sundry about his victory over LeChuck on Scabb Island (see *Monkey Island*). Naturally, things go wrong and he ends up a penniless chancer faced with having to defeat LeChuck once more, while navigating a huge number of madcap puzzles and crazy characters.

We know that the core is brilliant, so the questions about this *Special Edition*

are all about the new additions, like the redone control system and voices.

Monkey Island SE's controls were maligned by some, although some of this complaining was clearly over the top. Still, *Monkey Island 2 SE* has a much more intuitive and simple system that, if you want, can be switched for the game's original 2D mode by tapping F1.

NEW M12

Vocally, things are equally good, with Dominic Armato reprising his Guybrush Threepwood role yet again. The only sour note, for some, is the voice of Elaine Marley – a strong character who comes across as whiny. Although complaints about her will be exaggerated. The rest of the cast are very good, so the biggest stumbling block has been hurdled with ease. Also, the new voices can now be used with the classic version.

Strangely, some of the puzzles are made a little bit more difficult because the new animations seem to run too quickly. It's something you'd have expected the developers to deal with though, so it tarnishes things a little.

There's a case for complaint about the bizarre removal of the opening and post-closing sequences, and the dancing

monkeys, but as there are no cuts from the actual meat of the game generally, this is a good remake.

Monkey Island 2: Special Edition is a great remake, delivering high-quality dialogue, puzzles, graphics and acting which make this game an absolute joy to play once more. Even without the jiggling simians. **PCZ**



PCZONE

GRAPHICS Delish background
SOUND No iMuse, but still great music
MULTIPLAYER Not a chance

- ✓ Same great game
- ✓ Lovely visual update
- ✓ Great voices
- ✓ Developers commentary
- ✓ Intuitive interface
- ✗ Perplexing cuts

92
Big Whoop



HEGEMONY: PHILIP OF MACEDON

David Brown definitely has father issues

DEVELOPER Longbow Games
PUBLISHER Longbow Games
WEBSITE longbowgames.com/hegemony
ETA Out now
PRICE \$29.99 (£20)

AT A GLANCE...

Historical strategy game that tries to meld the *Total War* games with *Command & Conquer*.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
2.4GHz processor, 1GB RAM
(2GB *Vista/7*), and a 256MB
graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

ROME: TOTAL WAR 93%

NAPOLEON:
TOTAL WAR 89%

C&C4: TIBERIAN
TWILIGHT 60%

THERE ARE PERIODS of history that are ignored by developers, generally they prefer to stick to the established eras so as to maximise potential sales. There's no point doing an historical strategy game based on a minor battle in the Boer War when you can churn out another World War II RTS and grab plaudits.

Naturally then, nobody bothers with Philip of Macedon when his son, young Alexander the show-off, conquered the ancient world and ended up embalmed in honey. That's where Longbow Games have decided to strike out in a bold new direction, focusing on Daddy Macedon rather than his offspring.

You take control of Philip and set about rebuilding his empire in *Total War* style. But *Hegemony* has got just as many elements of more action-oriented strategy titles, like *Command & Conquer*



games, as it does with Creative Assembly's historical epics.

While there's a funky zooming thing going on between the campaign map and the battle map – both being one and the same in essence – everything is played out in real-time. In some ways, this doesn't work as well as it could, because you get lulled into a relaxed, carefully considered style of play, when really you should be playing like you're in C&C instead. There is a pause option to allow you to consider your moves, but this can end up being forgotten about.

GENERAL PAPA

As the interface is a little fiddly it's easy to make errors during the more intense scrums, accidentally dragging units into the wrong place or selecting the wrong ones in the heat of battle.

As well as this, the choice of subject matter – original as it is – limits how diverse the game can be. Unlike in *Rome: Total War*, you haven't got the variety of units from exotic parts of an empire to play with, just bog-standard hoplites, spearmen and peltasts.

The economic elements of the campaign map are reasonably done though, seeing you manually create

trade routes and linking farms with your cities.

Hegemony doesn't have anywhere near the polish, variety or "play me, play me!" factor of *Total War* games, and so it's difficult to recommend it when *Rome* is so cheap now. That said it's a decent strategy offering, but limited by its admirable attempt to go where few developers have gone before. **PCZ**

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Basic
SOUND Uninspiring
MULTIPLAYER Nowt

- ✓ Interesting scenario
- ✓ Nice zoom-y campaign map
- ✓ Set up infrastructures
- ✗ Scenario too limited
- ✗ *Rome: TW* is £5 and better
- ✗ Unpolished interface

68
Daddy Not-So-Cool

SMARTER COOKIES ENABLED



JOIN US ONLINE AT
WWW.PCGAMER.COM

Really impressed with the website! This is a huge step for PC Gamer, and as an avid listener of the podcast it's going to be a helpful tool for bridging us listeners to you journalists. Looking forward to visiting here regularly – bookmarked. **Radenska**

Brilliant site and PC dedicated. The site now sits proudly in my bookmarks bar. **rhirons**

From print to pixels in proper fashion, finally! Looks fantastic, keep it up. **walk_star**

Yeah!! Long Live PCGAMER! **uncannychuckles**

Hey Guys... Good work on the Site... It's great to see some PC lovin' for once... **Bloodhammer**

Awesome site. Just like to say what an awesome site you have created. It has now taken over as the first page I see when I log on. **Alienminator**

Congrats on the new site. Looks sleek and sexy. Thumbs up! **Boyarpunk**

Must admit, you've outdone yourselves here chaps. **Donbar**

THE WORLD'S NUMBER ONE PC GAMES MAGAZINE



WHAT DO YOU THINK OF PCGAMER.COM?

I blinked and the old site was gone and replaced by something shiny new and lovely. **Djr**

So happy to see a fully fledged, independent PCGAMER website. Congrats guys, and keep up the good work! **BuzzKiel**

Thank you for all your work getting this site put up, really excited to use it. **BloOdyman**

This is the best thing to happen to PC gaming community this year. This is awesome!!!! **Valderrama**

I now have a new favourite gaming website. Your magazine is fantastic and it's good to see you taking a huge step forward like this! You guys are the best gaming coverage team in the world. **EC**

THANK YOU. WE'LL SEE YOU ONLINE SOON!



LEGO HARRY POTTER: YEARS 1-4

Jon Blyth re-enacts the boy wizard's golden years

DEVELOPER Travellers Tales
PUBLISHER Warner Interactive
WEBSITE games.kidswb.com/official-site/lego-harry-potter
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99



AT A GLANCE...

Another tale told in the beautiful medium of blocks and mime. It's big, funny, and clever.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
Pentium 4/Athlon XP 2200 1.8GHz CPU, 512MB RAM, and a 256MB RAM ATI X1300/NVIDIA FX 5800 graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

LEGO HARRY POTTER **87%**

LEGO BATMAN **79%**

LEGO INDIANA JONES 2 **70%**

LET'S GET THIS out of the way, again, *LEGO Harry Potter* doesn't support mouse and keyboard. Unless you've got a gamepad, you'll have your fingers scrunched together on the keyboard, and you'll feel like a fussy insect grooming itself. It does make sense, in a way, but it's also a deeply unfriendly decision.

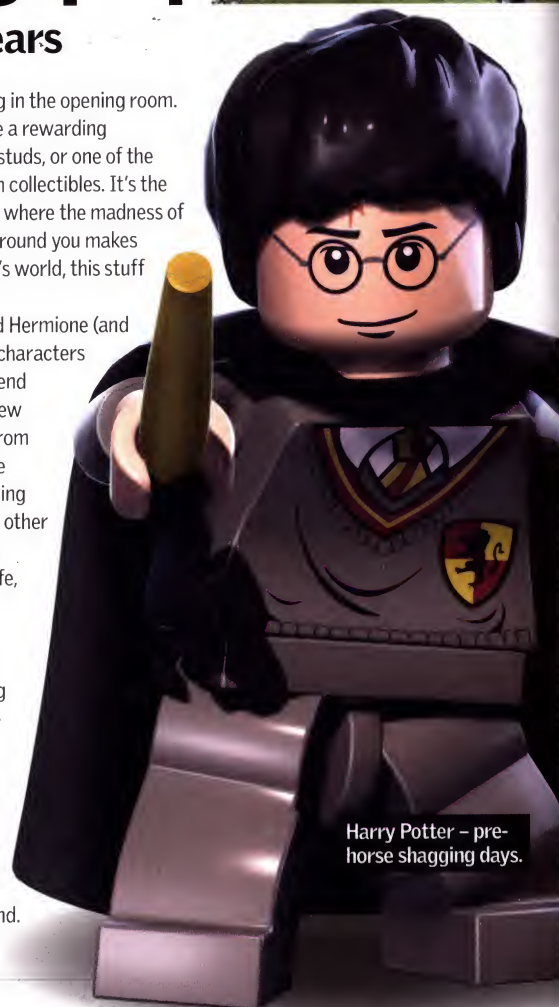
And that's about it, as far as my criticisms go. Stunningly, Travellers Tales' adventures in Hogwarts are the fullest, most charming, and deepest *LEGO* experience yet.

FUN-PACKED ROOMS

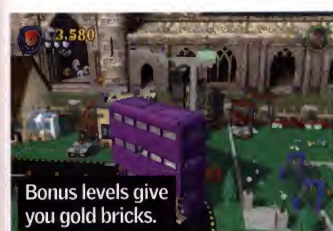
Hogwarts' rooms are so dense with destructible objects, secret bonuses, interactive moments, and concealed comedy that you can spend a happy few minutes simply casting Hagrid's levitate

spell at everything in the opening room. The results will be a rewarding animation, LEGO studs, or one of the often ultra-hidden collectibles. It's the first *LEGO* games where the madness of what's going on around you makes sense. In Rowling's world, this stuff is normal.

Harry, Ron and Hermione (and the host of other characters you'll control) attend lessons to learn new skills and, apart from eight spells, you're constantly unlocking a huge number of other abilities. Lumens scares off plant life, hopping into a cupboard will give you a set of earmuffs allowing you to pick up the screaming Mandragora plants. These not only smash glass doors, but those stud jars you've been seeing around.



Harry Potter – pre-horse shagging days.



The self-contained nature of each room lets the developers get away with some obscure, initially irrational stuff, to the point where even *LEGO* newcomers will quickly pick up the game's internal logic. This is a logic that can falter. I was frustrated when the game broke its own, unspoken "self-contained" rule. I was looking for a spider, and the garishly-coloured spider's web in the next room was an obvious clue, in retrospect, but the dodgy collision detection led me to waste 20 minutes in that hospital room. To the game's credit, I kept finding new things to interact with in the room, even if it wasn't the damned spider.

As you progress through the first four of Rowling's books, you'd worry that the school might get repetitive. But it doesn't, the place gets re-decorated, new things pop up in response to your new spells, and students react to the calendar and events of the book in charming ways. Some of the boss battles are annoying, the Basilisk in the Chamber of Secrets is a poorly-flagged fight, but still satisfying to complete.

"An imperfect romp that manages to covers its flaws with charm and relentless action"

IT'S A BIG, DENSE WORLD

You can't move for stuff to do



1. Items on the table dance around and crap out low-rank studs 2. Get both pictures and a House Crest will pop out. 3. Levitate these stools into a staircase to get the Crest. 4. This platform rises – get Harry onto it. 5. There's a door handle up here you need to go on. 6. Light candles if you want, there are studs in them.



When you enter Gringott's bonus vault, you begin to realise the scope of the game. All the sandbox stuff that's completely unnecessary, but possibly part of *LEGO*'s contract to remind kids that they can still build real stuff with bricks. Travellers Tales understand how much kids love games, and why they love them, because there's so much fantastic and varied stuff to do.

YOUNG AT HEART

I feel like I shouldn't enjoy this game. I'm three times the age of its target market. I feel like I'm expected to have a cynical take on the *LEGO* formula, and "people who read *Harry Potter* on the Tube". But screw that, I'm a defiant reader of the kid's cover versions, and I'll enjoy this game in the same way I enjoyed the books, as an imperfect

romp that manages to covers its flaws with charm and relentless action.

Dealing with a subject matter that's not revered by adults has really let Travellers Tales make a kid's game that's nothing short of excellent. **PCZ**

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Top rank blocks
SOUND Oohs, aahs, gasps
MULTIPLAYER Two-player co-op

- ✓ Massive and ambitious
- ✓ Ambitious
- ✓ Easy to complete
- ✓ Rock hard to master
- ✗ No mouse or keyboard
- ✗ Occasional logical lapse

87

That'll teach 'em



DARKEST OF DAYS

Darkening your day since 79AD

DEVELOPER 8monkey Labs
PUBLISHER Phantom EFX
WEBSITE darkestofdays.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
2GHz Pentium 4, 768MB RAM, and
a 128MB graphics card.

HOW DO YOU fancy playing an FPS spanning over 2,000 years of history with authentic weaponry and unique level design for each period? What's that? You'd kill your own grandmother for such a game? Well put that knife away – *Darkest of Days* isn't worth it.

Although the game has levels set during the destruction of Pompeii to the late 22nd Century, the majority takes place during a very brown American Civil War and an even more brown World War One.

This is a real shame as the premise is fantastic and the gameplay, while very basic, is enjoyable in patches. The bolt-action rifles you spend most of your time with feel satisfying and, although the level design is amateurish, there are some glimmers of potential, such as fighting in a cornfield near a dilapidated mansion and sprinting through the battle of Tannenberg's artillery barrages.

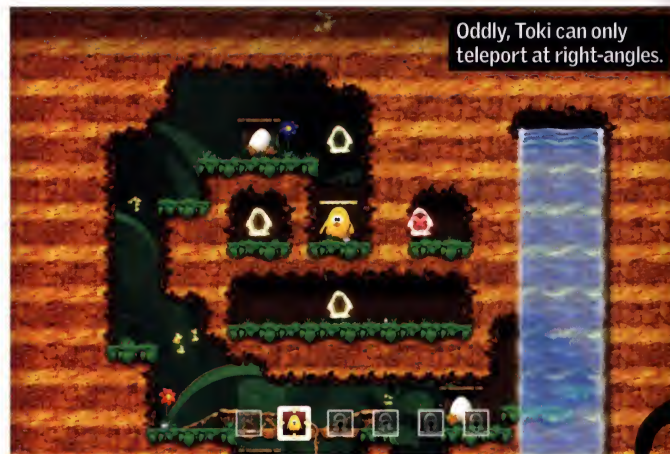
Also, while the game's engine looks ropey, it simulates trench warfare and large-scale charges relatively well.



The problem is *Darkest of Days* simply doesn't deliver on its promises. The timeline spanning story is throwaway nonsense, with no apparent explanation for why your character is plucked from the battle of Little Big Horn and given the task of finding the scientist responsible for making time travel possible. The AI soldiers run around like Sarah Jessica Parker when you throw a crap film script at her, and at almost £30 it's twice the price it should be.

Darkest of Days has some bright ideas and can be enjoyable, but it's got too many issues to recommend it.

Rick Lane



TOKI TORI

A game that stole Mario's clothes

DEVELOPER Two Tribes
PUBLISHER Two Tribes
WEBSITE tokitori.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £3.49

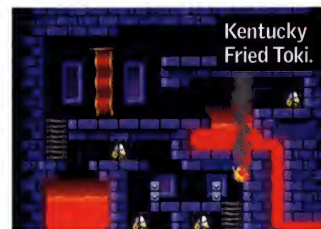
MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
1.5GHz or better processor, 512MB
1GB RAM (Vista/7), and a 128MB
graphics card.

TOKI TORI IS an absolutely terrible bird, he can't fly and he can barely even jump. All he can do is walk left and right and - flutter his pathetic wings as his fat yellow backside plummets to the ground, like some kind of obese kiwi.

On the other hand he can build bridges, teleport himself, and encase enemies in big blocks of ice with his ridiculously sized freeze gun. He might not make a great bird, but he's a pretty good protagonist for a silly platformer.

However, *Toki Tori* isn't what it seems on the surface. Behind the deceptively vibrant visuals and platforming elements lurks a tough puzzle game where one wrong step will result in disaster.

Each of Toki Tori's abilities can only be used a limited number of times during each stage. Your job is to figure out where and when to use these abilities to collect all of the bird's lost eggs and progress. For example, freezing all the enemies on a stage might seem like a good strategy, until



you realise that the frozen enemies block your path.

The levels do become tough, but they're all relatively quick so any frustration is short lived. It would've been good to have a few more open-ended stages so you could play with your abilities a little more. Also, while the visuals are great, the music – described as "catchy" by the game's blurb – is bloody annoying.

Overall, playing *Toki Tori* is like putting your finger into a kitten's mouth, only to realise that the kitten is actually a great white shark. Except this is a good thing.

Rick Lane



Before light bulbs, sacks of gold signified ideas.

Battles can quickly become confusing.

Sticky puppies! What a nuisance!

Look... a puppy attached itself to me...

A FAREWELL TO DRAGONS

Rick Lane says goodbye to dragons and hello to mediocrity

DEVELOPER Arise, Kranx Productions

PUBLISHER 1C Publishing

WEBSITE 1cpublishing.eu/game/a-farewell-to-dragons

ETA Out now

PRICE £24.99

IF YOU'RE GOING to base a game on a book, it's probably a good idea to make sure you don't bugger up the script. If you're going to base a game on a book by a respected author and make this your main selling point, it's definitely a good idea to ensure you don't bugger up the script.

1C proudly boast that *A Farewell to Dragons* is based on books by the respected Russian authors Nick Perumov and Sergey Lukyanenko. But it's doubtful that these celebrated scribes will be proud to be connected to this magnificently mundane adaptation of their fantasy novels.

DULL-ABLO

The English translation of the game's script turns a potentially interesting story into an utterly baffling, and unintentionally hilarious, word log-jam.

The game's protagonist, Victor – a conscientious doctor who surprises

himself by turning out to be an expert warrior – awakes in his home to find a 13 year-old girl named Telle lying unconscious on his kitchen floor. Despite not knowing what she's doing there, who she is, or where she lives, he decides to return the girl to her home. During this futile journey the pair are somehow transported to a fantastical realm which is populated by all the boars and bandits you could possibly be indifferent about killing.

The monumental awfulness of the script doesn't really hit home until you reach the game's first generically named fantasy settlement, whereupon you're met by a woman standing beside the smouldering wreck of a building. When asked what happened to the occupants, she replies: "Everyone inside must have died! What a nuisance!" Yeah, how inconsiderate of them.

The game itself is relatively playable, aside from the camera control, which feels a little like trying to guide an inebriated Boris Johnson across *Total Wipeout*'s course. A far bigger issue is that *A Farewell to Dragons* does nothing to differentiate itself from the truly incalculable number of isometric RPGs out there. You wander around picking up uninteresting fetch quests and battling stereotypical fantasy enemies, levelling up a standard batch of abilities

and magical powers. Apparently the effectiveness of elemental magic depends on the time of day, but this intriguing idea is nullified by the ability to rest at any time you like.

In a way the catastrophic writing is something of a blessing, as it's the only thing that makes *A Farewell to Dragons* vaguely interesting. Although, and don't wet yourself with excitement, but there are trains. Trains in a fantasy world. How mind-blowing. **PC7**

AT A GLANCE...

Astonishingly average isometric RPG with a camera twitchier than an abused dog and a disastrously translated script.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
2GHz Pentium 4, 1GB RAM, and a GeForce 6800.

HOW IT STACKS

TITAN QUEST 81%

TORCHLIGHT 76%

A FAREWELL TO DRAGONS 45%

How the *Daily Mail* treats burglars.

PCZONE

GRAPHICS World feels empty
SOUND Passable, no voiced dialogue
MULTIPLAYER Nonexistent

- ✓ Looks alright
- ✓ Has trains in it
- ✗ Terrible camera controls
- ✗ Horrible translation
- ✗ Unoriginal gameplay

45
Good riddance

She found having her crotch tattooed oddly exciting.



Mad Scientist party games.



Now you can pay to have a job.



Curtains never suit anyone.

THE SIMS 3: AMBITIONS

Tamsin Oxford takes a shower after hours of extortion and expansion

DEVELOPER The Sim Studio
PUBLISHER EA
WEBSITE sims3.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £24.99



AT A GLANCE...

Do the laundry, wash the dishes, go to work, and suffer commuter fatigue with the little people, again.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
2.4GHz CPU, 1.5GB RAM, and 128MB graphics card. *Sims 3* installation required.

HOW IT STACKS

SIMS 3 92%

SIMS 3: WORLD ADVENTURES 78%

SIMS 3: AMBITIONS 73%

HELLO, MY NAME is Sim 1138 and it's been six months since my last expansion...

Yes, we already have another expansion pack from the desperately busy gnomes at The Sim Studio but this time you can do your laundry and try out whole new careers that stop you from fainting with boredom while your sims are at work. Welcome to the second of soon-to-be many *Sims 3* expansion packs, and one that doesn't do much for EA's reputation for churning out these very packs in order to squeeze their fans out of every last drop of their money.

The premise is simple: you control your sim during work hours as long as you choose one of the new Professions – Firefighter, Ghost Hunter, Stylist, Private Investigator, and Architectural Designer. Alternatively they can become self-employed by registering at the City Hall and selling their crap to naive Sims.

As with every expansion, some of the basic interactions within the game have undergone a measure of surgery. Communicating a desire to play chess with an attractive sim no longer requires you to stomp over to the chess board, sit down and the attempt to invite the other sim. Now it is a one-click affair. There are also new lifetime

wishes, lifetime rewards and skills and activities. And they can do laundry. No, that didn't excite me either.

Some of the new activities and skills bring this expansion to life. You can now work from home and skill your sim up in a rather impressive variety of areas, including Tattooing and Inventing. They can also become a mad inventor by learning the Handiness skill and inventing an evil Simbot that can destroy the entire town. Frankly, considering what we endured reviewing this game we wouldn't mind creating one of these ourselves.

MONEY BURNER

In the careers themselves EA have been clever in capitalising on two of the main fan passions – sim creation and house design – with careers like Stylist, Tattoo Artist and Architect. The cheesy humour that has always been part of *The Sims* is evident in careers like Ghost Hunter and Private Investigator, where the mood music, special effects and in-jokes are terrible, obvious, and, because of this, amusing. Yes, it's *Ghostbusters* with sims.

It's in the little details where this expansion fails. There are some flaws in the implementation that should have been ironed out prior to release.

Controlling your Sims in the various professions can be frustrating and, in one case, a bug prevented a sim from ever returning to work. She just stood outside reading while her bar turned red and the gamer even redder.

These weaknesses are what change *Ambitions* from an exciting addition to *The Sims* stable and into a money sucking expansion whore. **PCZ**

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Same Sim fun
SOUND Turn it down and listen to Spotify
MULTIPLAYER No

- ✓ Some neat tweaks to interactions and skills
- ✓ The Professions are fun
- ✓ You can create a Simbot
- ✗ Niggles and bugs
- ✗ Oh God, it's another expansion

60
Money burner

Don't loose your head over it mate.



The unsubtle approach.



Goujons or nuggets?



Oily.



SNIPER: GHOST WARRIOR

David Brown covers himself in leaves and crawls around in the dirt

DEVELOPER City Interactive
PUBLISHER City Interactive
WEBSITE city-interactive.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £24.99

CITY INTERACTIVE ARE mostly known for lower-than-bog standard stuff like *Beauty Factory* and those atrocious *Art of Murder* adventures, amazingly of which there are now three and counting. *Sniper: Ghost Warrior* is their attempt to push forward out of the bargain bin bollocks zone and into the mainstream area. The strange thing is, as a game with "sniper" in the title, there's a surprising amount of run-and-gun shooting.

The first thing you notice is that everything is very *Modern Warfare*-inspired, right down to the slow-motion door-busting room clearances on an oil rig. Familiar? Indeed it is. As is the part at the beginning where your spotter says, "You take the one on the left."

After a couple of missions of sneaking around in the long grass, you switch to an assault team, attacking the aforementioned oil rigs and, from there,

merging missions with the sniper, approaching the situation from different perspectives.

This all works pretty well, but considering the developers just ripped off a highly successful game, it's not surprising that they manage to get the basics right. *Sniper* never goes beyond the simplistic, copycat approach and never tries to, so at it's very, very best, this is an average-yet-enjoyable stealth-shooter. Sadly, it sinks below this level on too many occasions.

LETHAL BUSHES

A stealth-shooter has ensure its stealth element is spot on, and this is where *S:GW* falls down. It seems the best way to get through most areas is to find the route the game wants you to take, because if you do the enemies don't seem to be able to spot you, regardless of how close you are. Deviate from this line a little and enemies will suddenly spring into life and mow you down. The combat side of things works better, but only in the previously discussed "does just enough" way.

As for the multiplayer, avoid it unless you love people crouching in bushes blasting you from miles away – it's all snipers, all the time. You rarely see an enemy player and there appears to be

a fault with the sound, meaning you hear distant gunshots and death screams as if they were right next to you. To say this makes things mildly disorientating is an understatement.

As a budget alternative to *Modern Warfare 2*, you could do worse than *Sniper*. Then again, you could also do better, because *Sniper*'s not on sale at a budget price. Only worth buying if you see it in a bargain bin. **PCZ**

AT A GLANCE...

Average *Modern Warfare* clone that has a surprisingly small amount of pure sniping in it.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
3.2GHz CPU, 1GB RAM, and a 256MB graphics card with Shader Model 3.0 support.

HOW IT STACKS

CALL OF DUTY: MODERN WARFARE 2 94%
BATTLEFIELD: BAD COMPANY 2 84%
SNIPER: GHOST WARRIOR 65%



Ragdolls are funny.

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Surprisingly good
SOUND Reasonable set of bangs and booms
MULTIPLAYER All snipers, all the time

- ✓ Sniping element works
- ✓ Visually impressive
- ✓ Just like *Modern Warfare 2*
- ✗ ...just not as good.
- ✗ Poor stealth element
- ✗ Dull multiplayer

65
Gutter snipe

State of Play

Increasingly developers tinker with their creations long after their release. With this in mind, every month we cast fresh eyes on the changes seen in long-running games...

Another PC ZONE reader is about to bite the dust.

THIS MONTH...

COUNTER-STRIKE: SOURCE

PUBLISHER Valve WEBSITE steampowered.com PRICE £13.99

LAUNCHED OVER A decade ago as a mod for one of the most important games ever, *Counter-Strike* has become a pastime for tens of thousands of people worldwide. Its success is rooted in the way it's changed and yet remained unchanged.

Evolving from a bolt-on extra to *Half-Life* with a look and feel barely different from the game on which it was based, *Counter-Strike: Source* is now a modern-feeling thing. Over the years it's had numerous revisions big and small, while steadfastly sticking to its principles and listening patiently to the bad tempered, semiliterate know-it-alls who play it.

Although its popularity has never dwindled, put both the 1.6 mod and *Source* versions together and you have

a title with almost twice the head count of its closest rival, it isn't attracting new blood. A lot of the people who play it today have always played it, and the clubby feel of most servers, together with the fact everyone seems to be in a clan, means newbies don't feel welcome. Because they aren't.

NEW GUTS

As a result, *Counter-Strike* has recently had its biggest upheaval since 2004, when its engine was swapped for *Half-Life's* GoldSrc to *Source*. The nuts and bolts of the world's most famous hostage rescue game have been changed from old *Half-Life 2* code to *Orange Box*, meaning it now runs the latest version of Valve's engine that supports *Windows* and *Mac*

OS X and now powers *Team Fortress 2* and *Portal*.

Besides support for the six per cent of *Steam* users with *Macs*, the biggest gains you'll see from this upgrade are multi-core processing, allowing owners of multi-core processors (ie pretty much every desktop CPU sold in the past few years) to reap the benefits of multi-core rendering; better HDR support, juicier

explosions; along with tweaks, bug fixes and enhancements inside *Source* itself.

But *Counter-Strike* players are never more than a few moments away from complaining about something, and it's the extras Valve has added to the game, on top of these engineering works, that have polarised a community which prides itself on acting like a two year-old beating the floor in a tantrum.

While Valve promised to keep the mechanics of the game itself will stay exactly as they were, the addition of over 100 achievements, 'cinematic' death shots, a redesigned scoreboard overflowing with information, not to mention persistent player stats and a domination/revenge system – all of which we've seen before in other titles –



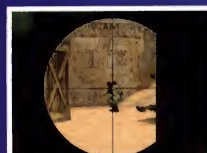
Achievements comes to CS:S.

THE STORY SO FAR...
COUNTER-STRIKE**1999 - BETA 1**

Four maps, a handful of guns, and looking not so different from *Half-Life*. Who'd have thunk it?

**2001 - VERSION 1.3**

The game gets integrated voice comms, transforming matches for casual and hardcore players alike.

**2003 - VERSION 1.6**

The current version of the original mod, updated many times to fix exploits, crashes and server issues.

**2004 - CS:SOURCE**

The game is rewritten to use the *Source* engine, and existing players claim the whole idea is gay and sux.

**2010 - CS:S 2009**

Mac owners join in. No play mechanics are added, removed or modified in the port to 2009's *Source*.

2011 - THE FUTURE

The only thing we know about *Counter-Strike 2* is that you shouldn't hold your breath for it.

-TT-Stevi_jones (31)

If only counter-terrorism really was this much fun.



Some things the old hands hate.

Counter-Strike veterans are creating something of a fuss.

If you've spent more than five minutes with *TF2*, you'll find it hard to understand why everyone's in such a tizzy. Achievements are frivolous tasks that any veteran will have accomplished donkey's ago (plant 100 bombs, kill 500 enemies with the high-explosive grenade, win in less than 30 seconds, and so on), they don't get in the way of the game. They're a bit of harmless fun, the sort of thing that entertains casual players and can be ignored by everyone else.

The 'cinematic death camera' is long overdue. Panning back to see yourself

slump to the ground before getting a demeaning close-up of your killer has been an integral part of both *Day of Defeat* and *TF2* (where it is used in conjunction with taunts for comedic effect), and in *Counter-Strike* can only help people learn from each other and identify cheats.

OLD COMPLAINTS

The clutter on the scoreboard takes some getting used to, but if players had ever set foot in other games they'd quickly realise it's standard fare for any title that preserves match data for rankings. And the domination/revenge system, where

getting killed repeatedly by the same opponent, will result in you being humiliated and under pressure to even the score can only bring out the best in even the most timid players. Nobody wants to be flagged as someone's bitch.

It's true this upgrade has brought genuine problems. The code change included numerous bugs, though Valve have already fixed most of them, releasing a succession of updates addressing the most reported issues. The beauty of *Steam* is that everyone gets the same updates automatically.

But therein lies the biggest problem of all. Every *Source* player is effectively on a roller coaster ride, unable to opt out of Valve's timetable for changes and is totally reliant on them plugging the holes they make along the way. Long gone are the days of reverting to a working prior version: like they say in the movies, there's no going back now. **PCZ**

VERDICT

Counter-Strike is better than ever.

It's still the old game to old hands, but is more accessible and more fun. If you gave up on the game a while back, it's time to give it another go.

Phil Cameron

Budget

David Brown rummages around in the bargain bin

F.E.A.R.

PUBLISHER Warner Bros WEBSITE store.steampowered.com/app/21090 PRICE £699

THIS IS WHERE that Alma thing started. *FEAR* was inspired for its time, providing unnerving horror moments mixed in with old-fashioned action. And, of course, it had the delightful unarmed attacks, available both in the single and the multiplayer games.

You played as a member of the First Encounter Assault Recon team, the contrived name of a police-y squad sent in to deal with strange happenings. This time it involves a guy who eats people's faces and a girl who likes to go "Boo!" at you when you turn around to descend ladders.

The shooting bits involve nailing supersoldiers' heads to walls using the erotically named Penetrator gun while diving around in bullet-time.

The multiplayer side is utterly forgettable, barring the laugh value of slide-kicking your friends to death, but otherwise *FEAR* has aged reasonably well. It's no longer good enough to elicit oohs and aahs like it used to, but there's still a good game here, even if the repetition of drab locations grates far more than it used to. And then there's the Norton Mapes...



BUDGET
GAME
OF THE
MONTH



The worst kind of spillage.



Sparks will fly when supersoldiers abound.

THIS MONTH PCZONE SAVED MONEY BY...



Steve chopped off his feet, saving on chiropodist bills.
SAVING £1,323

Log never got charged for the iPad he bought in the USA.
SAVING £63



David got a free half-chicken at Nandos, but then gorged himself with some extra sides.
SAVING £0

FRONTLINES: FUEL OF WAR

PUBLISHER Focus Multimedia WEBSITE focusmm.co.uk PRICE £999

THE ACRONYM FOR the unit you're part of in *Frontlines: Fuel of War* isn't as catchy as F.E.A.R.: it's W.C.S.O., the Western Coalition Spec Ops unit. Why not Coalition of Spec Ops Westerners or C.O.W.S.?

Frontlines is split into a single-player mode focusing on the said C.O.W.S., with the storyline being detailed by a reporter shadowing your team, and a multiplayer game where 64 people can give each other a kicking online.

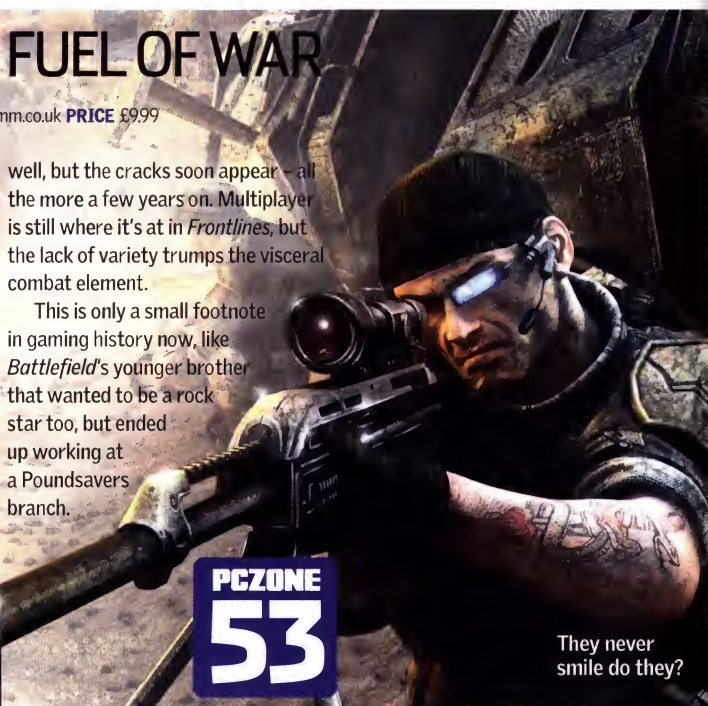
The latter is where you should be spending most of your time, because the solo mode is pish. Things start off

well, but the cracks soon appear – all the more a few years on. Multiplayer is still where it's at in *Frontlines*, but the lack of variety trumps the visceral combat element.

This is only a small footnote in gaming history now, like *Battlefield*'s younger brother that wanted to be a rock star too, but ended up working at a Poundsavers branch.



PCZONE
53



They never smile do they?

CALL OF CTHULHU: DARK CORNERS OF THE EARTH

PUBLISHER Bethesda Softworks WEBSITE store.steampowered.com/app/22340 PRICE £5.99

THERE'S A WONDERFUL bit near the beginning of *Dark Corners of the Earth* that lives in your memory forever afterwards.

It occurs after you enter the seaside town of Innsmouth, the most famous town in Lovecraft's universe next to Arkham, and have explored the ghostly place for a while. You find out snooping isn't appreciated, and, undeterred, you head to bed in the town's only hotel. Here you're woken by the deformed locals attempting to enter your room to nail your head to the floor.

A desperate flight ensues, as you are forced to escape to adjoining rooms, shoving wardrobes across doorways and then rushing off across the rooftops.

This is what most remember this first-person action/adventure/stealth for, not the truly shabby visuals and lack of fine-tuning, but for those few moments where it truly terrifies and impresses you.

And then you end up in a sewer killing spiders and the magic is lost.

PCZONE
68

NECROVISION

PUBLISHER 1C Company WEBSITE store.steampowered.com/app/7860 PRICE £9.99

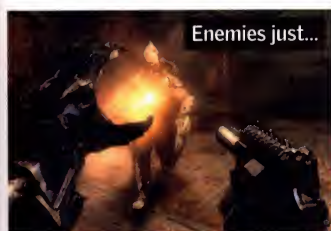
WEIRD UNDEAD GERMANS (not Nazis, this World War I here) with barbed wire whirling around their bodies sounds like a recipe for a great game. Sadly, an original idea and some bizarre creatures aren't enough to lift this *Painkiller*-esque shooter above the most basic of levels.

NecroVisioN is a pure shooter, with a sad lack of shooter sophistication. This doesn't mean that a shooter has to be bad – *Painkiller* wasn't, and *Bulletstorm* looks like it'll be a hell of a laugh – but *NecroVisioN* is put together with a real lack of slickness that makes it a chore to play.

There is a full-on prequel called *Lost Company* which features more of the same sort of action, but with more weapons, characters and drivable vehicles, so if your boxes do happen to be ticked by this kind of thing, there's more to punish yourself with.

Loyal players will be up for a fight in the multiplayer, as it isn't that old a game, but there's far better things to be spending your money on: *Painkiller: Black Edition* for example. It may be old, but it has the stake gun, which *NecroVisioN* never manages to top.

PCZONE
50



AND THE REST...

Dirt-cheap golden nuggets we played so you didn't have to



SEGA MEGA DRIVE CLASSICS PACK

£23.89, bit.ly/megaclassics
Eleven classic Sega games to back Mega Drive memories.

72



MASTER OF MAGIC

£3.96 (\$5.99), gog.com
A fantasy take on *Civilization*. It never hit those heights, even though it had a spell book.

62



ROOGOO

£6.99, bit.ly/roogoo
Quirky 3D puzzler with a shape-matching mechanic. Lacks variety and excitement.

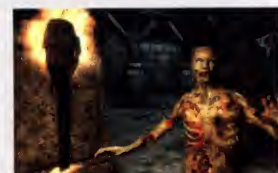
65

PCZONE TOP 5 BUDGET GAMES



MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR

£9.99, Steam
The historical RTS game that set the standard for others to follow. Buy it, if only to try out the mods.



THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION GOTY

£14.99, Steam
The sequel to *Morrowind* features the massive open-world gameplay expected from *Elder Scrolls* games.



COMPANY OF HEROES

£6.99, Steam
A challenging yet fun, WWII RTS that sees you playing Axis and Allies in the days after D-Day.



PSYCHONAUTS

£5.99, Steam
You won't have more fun than this psychological platformer unless *Brütal Legend* appears on the PC.



MASS EFFECT

£12.99, Steam
The definitive space opera RPG/shooter. A must-play, especially before you start *Mass Effect 2*.

Buyer's Guide

Don't stop buying them until they're bought

PCZ TOP 5

THINGS THAT AREN'T
SEEN IN FPS GAMES

- 1 PEOPLE FARTING**
Especially during stealth sections.
- 2 NUMBER TWOS**
When has anyone stopped mid-shoot out for a dump?
- 3 COMPETENT POLICE**
Why don't they arrest killers?
- 4 PTSD**
Any FPS star would have this.
- 5 PACIFISM**
There's too much shootin', not enough lovin'.



PCZ TOP 5

LICENSING DEALS
THAT'LL NEVER HAPPEN

- 1 KALASHNIKOV**
Modern Warfare 2
- 2 AFRICA TOURISM BOARD**
Far Cry 2
- 3 THE HISTORY CHANNEL**
Civilization IV
- 4 OBSESSIVE COMPULSIVE FOUNDATION**
World of Warcraft
- 5 JUST ABOUT EVERY UK FOOTBALL TEAM**
Pro Evolution Soccer

PCZ TOP 5

TIRED INSPIRATIONS

- 1 GEORGE A. ROMERO**
He did zombies first and best. Stop trying to beat the master.
- 2 MOVIES (IN GENERAL)**
Stop making games based on movies: they're always shite.
- 3 WORLD WAR II**
Time to find another war chaps.
- 4 BLADE RUNNER**
The future's crap – we get it already.
- 5 TOLKIEN**
Read my lips: NO MORE ELVES!



FPS



HALF-LIFE 2 + EPISODES

PCZ Issues: 148 (97%), 170 (91%), 187 (82%)

Excelling in terms of action, storyline, emotion and ingenious set pieces, the continuing adventures of Gordon Freeman have yet to be equalled. Yes, a moderate amount of the action has faded through repetition by the time the episodes kick in, but with its Combine-defying freedom fighting, this is still the most finely crafted shooter experience ever released on PC. Gordon's alive, and long may he remain so.



LEFT 4 DEAD

PCZ Issue: 202 – 93%

The only thing the we like more than killing zombies is killing zombies as a team. And that's what *L4D* provides: a chance to scream with your buddies as you kill endless amounts of mindless and murderous plague victims.



TEAM FORTRESS 2

PCZ Issue: 187 – 93%

Beautifully balanced and engaging, Valve's update of the classic mod is a triumph, bringing together the best of online shooters and topping it all off with superb animation that rivals the best Pixar's films.



LEFT 4 DEAD 2

PCZ Issue: 214 – 94%

Basically, this is *Left 4 Dead* in the Deep South. Except this one has new modes, new infected, new campaigns, as well as machettes and chainsaws for some serious slice and dicing. Better than the original.



FAR CRY 2

PCZ Issue 201 – 90%

A triumph of non-linear gameplay, *Far Cry 2* offers an astounding chunk of Africa in which to play with guns, flames and explosions. The residents are too tenacious, but in a world this well-realised, you won't care.



CALL OF DUTY: MODERN WARFARE 2

PCZ Issue: 215 – 94%

Take all of the greatest action movies of all time, stick them together, and add some semi-manufactured controversies, and you have a massive hit. Still, it's an absolutely great shooter.



BIOSHOCK

PCZ Issue: 185 – 96%

Despite the recent sequel having better gameplay, *BioShock* is still the superior game. Enter a destroyed Utopia under the sea, terrifying characters and emergent combat make this an unmissable experience.

STRATEGY



EMPIRE: TOTAL WAR

PCZ Issue: 205 – 94%

Vast yet manageable, accessible yet hardcore. All four words, and more, describe the best *Total War* game money can currently buy. With the addition of dramatic sea battles and an extended global campaign map, there's simply nothing else with the same grand scope that remains as easy to get into. We feel that the only game that will topple this game from its perch as the best strategy game around will be the next game in the *Total War* series. It really is that good.



COMPANY OF HEROES

PCZ Issue: 173 – 93%

With this game Relic took the best bits from RTS games and left out the crap, creating a game that's accessible, taxing and exciting. And its expansions *Opposing Fronts* and *Tales of Valor* keep the action coming.



WORLD IN CONFLICT

PCZ Issue: 186 – 92%

A stunning RTS set during the Cold War, offering innovative online play, a solid single-player campaign that combines great gameplay and a good story, jaw-dropping graphics and the best nuclear blast you've seen.



CIVILIZATION IV

PCZ Issue: 162 – 92%

A *Buyer's Guide* without a *Civ* game would be a sorry place, and the latest version is the greatest yet. Now with added warmongering and diplomacy in the expansion packs *Warlords* and *Beyond the Sword*.



SINS OF A SOLAR EMPIRE

PCZ Issue 193 – 91%

This startling beauty of an RTS seemed to come from nowhere, and quickly converted us from indifferent idiots into grateful idiots by surprising us with accessible complexity.



MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR

PCZ Issue: 175 – 91%

A blend of maniacal plotting on the strategic map and cheering with delight as your warriors collide spectacularly with your opponents' armies. Middle Ages war fun.



SUPREME COMMANDER

PCZ Issue: 179 – 88%

Huge battles of thousands of air, sea and land units? Giant stompy robots and a superb tactical map? One of the most original RTS titles around? Check, check and check.

ACTION/ADVENTURE



GRAND THEFT AUTO IV

PCZ Issue: 203 – 91%

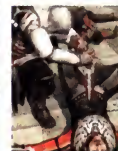
We PC users have had to wait a while (OK – we had to wait a bloody age) before we could return to Liberty City with Niko Bellic, but the delay has been worth it. This version of *GTA4* adds graphics that are a cut above those seen on the consoles, expanded multiplayer modes, and an exclusive video editor, to Liberty City's free-roaming world and the sure-to-be-classic storyline of Bellic's American dream becoming an American nightmare.



MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE

PCZ Issue: 136 – 93%

Payne is getting old, but it shows how to do bullet-time right. Noirish tone, a glowering voice-over and remarkable gun action mean that this is still a force to contend with.



ASSASSIN'S CREED 2

PCZ Issue: 220 – 90%

Travel around Venice and Italy, meet Da Vinci and make friends with some prostitutes, run along walls and kill lots of people. It's Assassin's Creed, but with all of the kinks smoothed out, and plenty of depth added.



FAHRENHEIT

PCZ Issue: 159 – 90%

Murder most foul, and you're the killer. *Fahrenheit* boasts a twisting, turning, brilliantly told story, featuring multiple character control, split-screen tension, branching scenes and several endings.



PSYCHONAUTS

PCZ Issue: 156 – 90%

Clever, witty, impeccably detailed and off its rocker – *Psychonauts* is proof that the anarchic edge of LucasArts hasn't completely left us. A slightly flawed game in some respects, but still a dazzling feat.



BEYOND GOOD & EVIL

PCZ Issue: 138 – 89%

We heap praise on this game on a monthly basis, but it's for a reason. Michel Ancel's superb journey through the strange land of Hillis is nothing short of storytelling magic. It's cheap now, so go out and buy it.



BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM

PCZ Issue 213 : 89%

Proof that licensed superhero games don't have to suck. *Arkham Asylum's* mix of action, RPG and stealth-'em-up play makes it a near classic. The best *Batman* game we've ever seen.

MMOs



WORLD OF WARCRAFT
PCZ Issue: 152 – 95%
Blizzard's recreation of Azeroth as a living virtual world doesn't disappoint. While its graphics are dated, it's beautiful to watch, absorbing to play and with more content than you can shake a magic stick at.



THE LORD OF THE RINGS ONLINE
PCZ Issue: 182 – 87%
A near-perfect recreation of Tolkien's tales, with solid combat and engaging plots, in a tasty MMO bundle. Meet Gandalf! Play as a hobbit or a spider! Middle-earth awaits...



WARHAMMER ONLINE: AGE OF RECKONING
PCZ Issue: 200 – 92%
Mythic slips *Warhammer* into their realm vs realm template. Even the most reluctant PvPer will launch themselves into huge open warfare, and drop into temporary group quests.



GUILD WARS
PCZ Issue: 156 – 94%
How to make a gaming accessible to the masses. A lot of thought has been applied, and there are no subscription fees. Newbies can feel at home, thanks to a totally skills-based setup.



EVE ONLINE
PCZ Issue: 130 – 88%
Elite Online has been a long-held fantasy for old school gamers, and this space sim has come the closest yet to making it a reality. A slow pace belies the options on offer, from mining to trading to piracy.

SIMULATION



X3: REUNION
PCZ Issue: 162 – 92%
Finally, a space sim to better *X2: The Threat*, and it just happens to be the sequel. This is possibly the best-looking game ever to appear on a PC. Oh, and it plays pretty well to boot. Why not get reunited with the X Universe?



IL-2 STURMOVIK: FORGOTTEN BATTLES
PCZ Issue: 128 – 92%
While flight sims are getting rarer and rarer, at least the quality remains high. None are more impressive than this ultra-classy WWII combat sim. Chocks away, comrade!



THE SIMS 3
PCZ Issue: 209 – 92%
The Sims 3 is like having your very own reality TV show in your PC, and just as addictive. Near complete freedom of gameplay lets you be a vicious dicta, or just a creepy voyeur.



MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR X
PCZ Issue: 175 – 89%
The latest (and maybe final) in the *Flight Simulator* series is the biggest since Microsoft started using actual polygons. What's more, the visuals may just sear your eyeballs.



OPERATION FLASHPOINT: DRAGON RISING
PCZ Issue: 213 – 90%
Like its peer *Arma II*, *OpFlash 2* aims to bring realistic warfare to your PC. But unlike its peer this game doesn't forget it's meant to be fun, not some kind of military training aid.

DRIVING/RACING



GTR2
PCZ Issue: 173 – 92%
Pick up this scarily realistic driving sim and race the car of your dreams. It comes with an improved driving model, new game modes and many other improvements. Guaranteed to make you feel like the Stig.



COLIN MCRAE: DIRT 2
PCZ Issue: 214 – 90%
The new rally game bearing the name of the deceased driver is a stunner. A successful mix of an arcade racer and simulator, that has most sumptuous graphics of any racer around. This sequel is going to be tough to beat.



BURNOUT PARADISE: THE ULTIMATE BOX
PCZ Issue: 205 – 89%
This game has set the standard for online arcade racers. Packs more speed than a drug dealer and more fun than slapping a bag full of Jonathan Rosses and Russell Brands.

NEW ENTRY!



BLUR
PCZ Issue: 223 – 90%
This is a racer of two worlds: on the one side there's the faintly serious road racer, and other the other the Mario Kart/Wacky Racers style game. This just proves, whatever a console can do, the PC can do better.

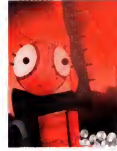


NEED FOR SPEED: SHIFT
PCZ Issue: 213 – 84%
The *Need For Speed* series gets serious. Well, not too serious as the game is still weighed in the favour of fun over realism. But this is a polished release, and the best *NFS* around.

ODDBALL



SPORE
PCZ Issue: 199 – 95%
This is four charming mini-games and an excellent space strategy game, glued together with a bunch of creation kits. It's also a beautiful one-off that is so well-realised that you should experience it yourself.



WORLD OF GOO
PCZ Issue: 201 – 90%
A stroke of indie genius, *World of Goo* is a puzzler in which you erect fantastic goo-based structures across a myriad of ominous and intriguing levels. Novel at every turn, this indie title is simply irresistible.



PORTAL
PCZ Issue: 187 – 89%
Ingenuous and absurdly funny, *Portal* is a four-hour slice of perfect puzzles and discovery. Hurling yourself through floors and walls sounds odd, but modern games are rarely more delightful.



GARRY'S MOD
PCZ Issue: 179 – 88%
The God game-like *Garry's Mod* gives you the tools to create almost anything you can think of in the Source engine, from working robots to saucy ragdoll JPEGs. Fun and easy to use, try it out and see for yourself.



BRAID
PCZ Issue: 209 – 90%
Braid is extremely pretentious, but extremely well made, with time-bending twists that'll provide a challenge to new and veteran platformers. It also has a secret editor for making your own levels.

SPORT



FOOTBALL MANAGER 2010
PCZ Issue: 214 – 88%
Every year sees another *Football Manager* appear to break up relationships across the country. But while *FM2010*'s updates mean it still holds the top spot, *Champ Man* is closing in.



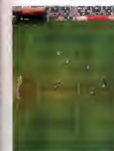
PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 2010
PCZ Issue: 214 – 85%
The football industry may ignore *PES*, but *PES* doesn't ignore PC users. This year's *PES* includes updates from the console release, something that *FIFA 2010* can't claim.



NBA 2K10
PCZ Issue: 214 – 90%
Something of a niche product in the UK, this remains a fantastic sports game. Forcing you to use proper basketball tactics during matches that look like they're really on TV, *NBA 2K10* proves it's the top of its league.



FOOTBALL MANAGER LIVE
PCZ Issue: 205 – 85%
All the joy of *Football Manager* with added MMO fun. Build your own team from scratch and develop your manager's skills, to let you take on other managers around the world.



CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 2010
PCZ Issue: 214 – 80%
With a new 3D match engine, and new features like the set piece creator, *Champ Man 2010* has jumped up in quality. While it still can't match *FM2010*'s depth, it's far more accessible.

ROLE-PLAYING



THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION
PCZ Issue: 167 – 95%
Oblivion's sublime graphics, intuitive character-creation and massive freeform gameplay, put paid to the myth that you have to own a beard and live with your mum to enjoy RPGs.



FALLOUT 3
PCZ Issue: 201 – 91%
While it does play like *Oblivion* in a sci-fi skin, this is a great open-world that's just as entertaining if you just wander across Washington state than if you follow the plot. And DLCs are adding to its greatness.



DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS
PCZ Issue: 214 – 93%
By delivering an RPG that's at once realistic, brutal, heroic, sexy and immersive, BioWare have secured their position as masters of the RPG genre. We're already eager to see what they'll do with *Dragon Age 2*.



MASS EFFECT 2
PCZ Issue: 218 – 93%
Darker in tone than the original, but featuring refined...well...everything, *Mass Effect 2* is a near-perfect mix of third-person gunplay and RPG storytelling. Just make sure you play *Mass Effect* first.



DEUS EX
PCZ Issue: 93 – 94%
This is the benchmark in RPGs – if not gaming. A twisting plot, exciting freeform levels and some moments of pure exhilaration and drama ensure *Deus Ex* remains the alpha male of the PC gaming world.

LOG'S PICK



BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM
PCZ Issue: 213 – 89%
I'm saying *Arkham Asylum* because I didn't want to say *World of Goo*. I love *World of Goo*, and I want 2D Boy to become ultra-billionaires riding around on diamond-eyed dragons, but I also feel I should acknowledge that it's 2010 now, and withdraw my Goo-gushing until they make a new game.
So, *Arkham Asylum*: the game I first played about 18 months ago when a surprisingly complete preview copy fell into my hands. The game I played completely through, unable to write about half of it, because of the NDA that came with it. Still, it was a privileged feeling – it's not often you finish a game for a preview – and it actually felt slightly naughty, like I was getting more than I deserved.
But it was well-judged for Rocksteady. By the time I got to do my interviews and write the preview, I was already 100% sold on their treatment of the caped bastard, and was desperate to write the actual review.
Well, that never happened – I never ended up reviewing *Arkham Asylum* for anyone. So those hours spent in the house, desperately telling an uninterested housemate that I was Batman, and he had to come and look, because I was being Batman on the telly, can remain a pure memory for me. Batman... I never had to give you a score. This love transcends percentages. Give us a cuddle.

DAVID'S PICK



FOOTBALL MANAGER 2010
PCZ Issue 214 – 88%
While doubters would decry it as being merely a spreadsheet or, if they're being kind, an "animated spreadsheet", they're clearly missing the point of why these games are so compelling to play. If you think of it being like an RPG then perhaps you'll come closer to understanding it. And if you factor in the fact your imagination has a lot to do with why you can enjoy something that, yes, does look like a swishier version of *Excel*. It's the emotional bond you form with your mental image of the players in your team that connects you to the game.
Like a good book, *FM2010* goes beyond the mere data presentation of facts and figures. Overanalyse the game and you miss the point, just like trying to interpret or explain why a classic book is saying what it says drains all the life from it. You might also want to think of it as a strategy game too, where your efforts are put into defeating an opponent using the information you have to hand.
Essentially, you've got the most comprehensive football database in the world, licensed by Premiership teams, coupled with an increasingly lush visual aspect that belies its spreadsheet origins. Yes, you're just watching a load of stick men running around on the screen, but if you break any game down to that level, they become absurd. It's a great game and there's reason why so many love it.

INCOMING!

Want to know what's coming out? Then turn to page 22 for the full run-down.



SHORTLIST OPEN!



LUIS



CHUN LI



FIGHT!

**GRAND THEFT AUTO IV:
THE BALLAD OF GAY TONY** **VS** **STREET FIGHTER IV**

Nearly 300,000 votes were cast in the longlist. Now it's time to pick from the cream of the crop.

The fight for gaming glory in the **2010 Golden Joystick Awards** just got serious and only **you** can decide who wins!



VOTE AT GOLDENJOYSTICK.COM



Search for 'Golden Joysticks'



[Twitter.com/GoldenJoysticks](https://twitter.com/GoldenJoysticks)

PCZONE

Hardware

Better gaming through technology

CAT-6 CON

EARLIER THIS WEEK someone sent me a link to the Denon AK-DL1, a weather-resistant, vibration-proof cable for audiophiles (people who make Scientologists seem like reasoned thinkers).

The AK-DL1 was something I'd sniggered at a few years ago, wondering how a trusted name like Denon could peddle such nonsense and how anyone could throw more than £300 at what was, patently, a length of Cat-6. Yes, the AK-DL1 is a 1.5m Gigabit patch cable that costs £330, despite being no different in appearance or in function to ones you can buy at Ebuyer for £2.95. Although the Ebuyer ones aren't weather resistant or vibration proof, and lack direction indicators.

More amazing than direction indicators is that the AK-DL1 is on sale. While Denon's UK site removed it from their pages a while back, Denon US lists it at \$499, and indeed you can still buy the AK-DL1 from specialist sites here. One retailer describes the cable as being famous for its "lack of jitter".

Anyway, I brought this business up because I've received a letter from someone asking if a USB cable with gold-plated connectors is better than one with connectors made of whatever non-gold-plated connectors are made of. You'll have to read the next *Dear Wendy* for my full response, but to summarise, it'd make an ideal gift for a Scientologist.

Wendy

Phil Wand
Hardware editor

A FUZZY FEELING

New range of Fuzion boards allows you to pick 'n' mix Radeon and GeForce cards

HAVING ANNOUNCED ITS £299 Big Bang Fuzion board last year, a high-end LGA1156 product with support for cross-vendor video cards, MSI has launched two more Fuzion products at half the price.

The new P55A Fuzion and 870A Fuzion both use the HYDRA 200, a 'brand agnostic' chip that uses an internal processor to load-balance graphics cards without a care for the badge they wear. As long as

you have Windows 7, and your fingers crossed, you can slot in two GPUs at different levels and manufacturers and have them work as a single device in the Fuzion's X mode.

HYDRA will also recognise same-brand cards and, in A or N modes,

providing support for using AMD or NVIDIA tech in parallel.



Don't eBay your old graphics card just yet.

The hardware support lists runs to Radeon HD 4-series and 5-series cards, together with the top end of GeForce 9-series boards and most GT/GTS/GTX 2xx cards. The GTX 250 is flagged as 'under test', while MSI's compatibility chart suggests you might want to stick with an all-Radeon or all-GeForce lineup rather than mixing the two.

While this is an interesting idea, but one which will surely generate 10 times the level of traffic on MSI's support site and 10 times the number of complaints on forums. Fuzion is a fascinating concept, but one for which there simply isn't sufficient demand, and it's hard to see why two cheaper variants will change anyone's mind.

uk.msi.com

WETA APPETITE

Avatar's XP secret

THE HIGHEST GROSSING film of all time was put together on HP machines using rendering software for Windows and Linux.

Special effects studio Weta Digital – responsible for titles such as *District 9* and the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy – used HP Blade servers and workstations to create *Avatar*. The software they use is called *Massive Prime* which runs on XP, Red Hat and Fedora.



The authoring software alone costs \$17,999.

At its data farm, Weta has over 2,000 ProLiant Blade Servers totalling 40,000 processor cores and more than 100TB RAM. The facility doesn't use air conditioning but environmentally friendly (and far cheaper) water cooling that uses rooftop heat exchangers.

wetafx.co.nz

NEWS ROUND-UP

SAPPHIRE HAVE DEMONSTRATED that three Zalman Trimon 3D monitors connected to a Radeon card through ATI Eyefinity, and viewed using polarizing glasses, is likely to give you motion sickness in addition to creating a more impressive 3D experience. Sounds expensive, the three 21.5in Trimon screens alone come to £900. sapphiretech.com

CONTINUING THE 3D theme: Ubisoft's head of marketing in the UK has claimed, rather boldly it should be said, that 3D TVs will be in every home within the next three years. This is despite the fact that everyone's just bought a new HDTV and now has no money. ubi.com/uk

DESPITE THE RUMOURS Intel have said they'll keep making Celeron CPUs. intel.com

WARNING:
THIS MONTH'S
HARD WORDS

BY RICHARD COSGROVE

ALIENWARE: Clothing made out of the skins of EBEs. Similar to leather, but far more exclusive due to its rarity. First appeared in Roswell, New Mexico. **LINUX:** Free operating system based on Unix. Incredibly reliable, but only usable by people whose first language is binary code and second is machine code. **FPS:** Abbreviation of "maximum fucks per session" – a commonly used stat used by porn producers to judge the endurance of their 'performers'. **EBE:** Abbreviation of 'Extraterrestrial Biological Entity' – creatures who kidnap unintelligent members of humanity, put them through horrifying experiences and later release them. Like Ant and Dec would do, if they had spaceships.

Dear Wendy

If it ain't broke, don't fix it. If it ain't working, don't panic...

PROBLEMS?

Mistook your wardrobe for the toilet again? Local shop stopped stocking your favourite blue-flavoured Pringles? Been playing *World of Warcraft* so long your partner's left you? Wendy can't help with those setbacks, but we can solve all your hardware hassles. Wendy knows all, and he's willing to help if you email him at: wandy@dearwandy.com, including details about your problem and system specs.

Q FACE PALMER

I was recently installing a demo from the *PC ZONE* DVD while surfing the web and doing various other bits when my PC froze.

Nothing too unusual, I thought, and rebooted it, but when it restarted, it just sat there. It's an MSI P7N SLI Platinum motherboard with two GeForce 9600 GTs, a Core 2 E8400 CPU, 6GB RAM, and a 500W Antec PSU, running Vista.

I've tried all the RAM individually and in pairs to see if any were at fault; resetting the CMOS; using one graphics card at a time; and also unplugging everything, but it just won't boot!

There's no sound from it, but if I start without RAM I get long beeps, so it's at least checking the RAM.

I think the motherboard is bugged but would love your input. If this is so, what would you replace it with so I can reuse most of what I have?

Alan Palmer

DRIVER WATCH

GRAPHICS

MANU	DESC	RELEASED
ATI	CATALYST 10.6	16 Jun 10
NVIDIA	Force Ware 257.21	15 Jun 10

SOUND

MANU	DESC	RELEASED
Creative	X-Fi Beta 2.18.0004	30 Jul 08
Creative	Creative Alchemy 1.20.04	01 Aug 08
Creative	Audigy Beta 2.18.0001	17 Jul 08



A This is one of the easier faults to diagnose, because it cannot possibly be software or driver related so can only be a hardware problem. The trouble is, as you're discovering, it's rather hard to pin down which bit is broken – at least not without access to substitute components or by reaching for your wallet.

I'm inclined to agree with your diagnosis, but you first need to examine everything else under the lid. It could be the E8400 chip at fault, although I find that hard to believe. In all my years of inserting, extracting, handling, dropping, cussing at, and endlessly reinserting CPUs, I've only ever come across one that was faulty.

My experience tells me that the mobo is the most likely candidate here, particularly as your system has

two video cards which means the problem is almost certainly not graphics related.

Having said all that, it could be your power supply. I've gone through many more PSUs than motherboards, and there's the added strain of running those 9600 GTs in SLI. A single card demands between 400W and 450W, depending on which GT model you have, whereas dual cards should have at least 500W and may demand up to 36A from the 12V rails. In other words, your Antec may only just cut the mustard here.

Q ALIEN HESITATION

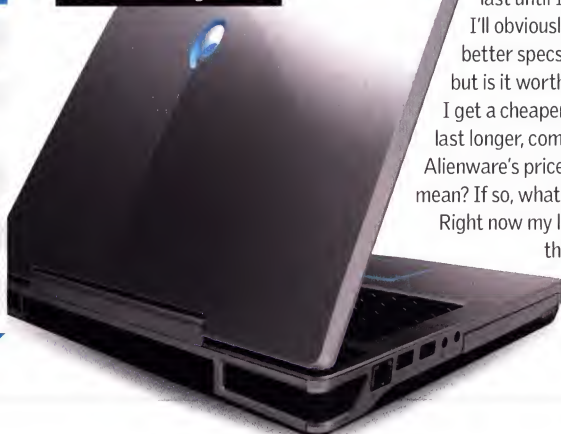
I'm planning on getting a new laptop in the future. Is it worth saving up to get a mid-range Alienware?

Right now the Alienware M15x is what I'm looking at. How long do you think one will last until I need to replace it? I'll obviously get one with slightly better specs than the base model, but is it worth the money? Should I get a cheaper one, and would it last longer, compared to the Alienware's price if you know what I mean? If so, what'd you recommend?

Right now my laptop can barely play the original *Dawn of War*. So it's worth my upgrading.

Rafe W

Don't dismiss the brand without looking closer.



Don't chuck an e-peen mobo: sell the copper on it.

A Alienware have always got a bad rap from people who can't see beyond high prices. But times have changed and, of course, the company is now part of Dell, a manufacturer famous for its low prices.

Looking at the Alienware range today it's difficult to pick a desktop or a laptop that's not just gamer-friendly and stylish, but which is also Dell-like good value. And the one you're looking at is a case in point. Configured with a Core i7 740QM processor, 1GB Radeon HD 5850, 4GB RAM and 1920x1080 15.6in screen, the cost rises from the M15x range's base price of £999 to £1,299 including VAT and delivery.

Consider that the same money would only just cover a base model MacBook Pro with a Core 2 and a tired GeForce 320M GPU working a lesser resolution 13.4in screen. If extrovert Alienware can match Apple for build quality, then there's no contest between the two.

Yes, I realise that *Dawn of War* isn't a Mac game, but Apple has become the default choice for people who claim to appreciate superior engineering and who are seemingly unaware that a far

wandy@dearwandy.com ✉
dear wandy, pc zone, future publishing, @
2 balcombe st, london, nw1 6nw

"Game developers have clearly yet to fully understand the core affinity issue"

wider choice of first-rate hardware comes with Windows or Linux on it.

I should point out that you do get a comparatively small 160GB hard drive with the M15x, but let's be honest here, few laptop owners need to carry around more. If you're concerned about games eating into your HDD space, find yourself an external 1TB unit for £70, or better still a Qnap, Thecus or Synology network storage device that you can access over a WiFi network. This option is expensive, but a decent NAS will continue to perform long after it has become obsolete.

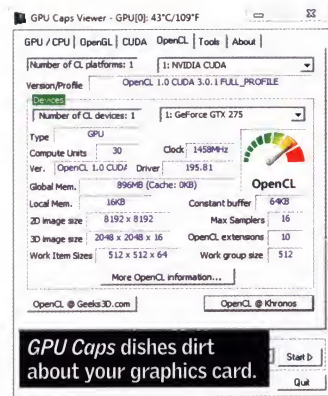
As for upgrades, I'd be inclined to imagine yourself keeping this laptop for three years, increasing the warranty to cover that period when you buy it. You could later visit upgrade shops such as mxm-upgrade.com and buy yourself into a new level of graphics technology, but my concern would be that you'd toast the hardware. Laptops are designed to cool specific components and stepping beyond the original contents of the Alienware chassis might result in bigger benchmark results, but will leave you with a laptop that's wobblier than Dawn French on stilts.

In short then, get the Alienware laptop but leave it alone. When it gets too old, sell it and get a new toy.

"Get the Alienware laptop. When it gets too old, get a new toy"

Q LAGGING BEHIND

I've been having lag problems recently and have tried many things to get the system working again. My PC's current spec is: Core 2 Q6600, 6GB RAM, 500GB drive, GeForce GTX 260, 600W power supply unit, on an MSI MS-7350 mobo, running Windows 7. The system is about three years old and I've since upgraded the RAM from 4GB, the OS from Vista, and the graphics card from an 8800 GTS.



The lag started out on most of the more demanding titles a few months ago but has since spread throughout all my games. It slows down the frame rate significantly for about three seconds every 10 or so.

Since it started I've tried a number of things including uninstalling my anti-virus, making more space on the drive, changing the GPU, upgrading from Vista to 7, replacing RAM, stopping processes running in the background, and updating the graphics drivers.

When monitoring the processor, the usage rapidly increases as soon as the game starts and then lags when the usage reaches 100% on one or two cores, which is often.

After trying everything to get this fixed – and spending lots of money – I can only imagine this is a hardware fault. Any help you can offer me would be greatly appreciated.

Charlie Thompson

A Had the problem manifested itself in just one or two of your older titles, I would have suggested you open Task Manager, start the game, then Alt+Tab back to Task Manager and

ALL ABOUT...

30 WINDOWS ME

Named after an illness that makes you incredibly tired, *Windows Me* was quickly made obsolete by the launch of *XP*.

Short for 'Myalgic Encephalomyelitis' or 'Mistake Edition' (though Microsoft insists 'Me' stood for *Millennium Edition*, having launched the product in 2000), *Windows Me* was superseded by the infinitely better *XP* within 18 months of its release. *Me* went on to become *PC World*'s fourth worst technology product of all time, yet it is still in widespread use.

If the loading screen with its playschool colours and jaunty angles wasn't enough to deter you, *Me*'s disregard for software and hardware compatibility and its propensity to crash would certainly make you wish you'd stuck with *Windows 98 SE* or upgraded to *Windows 2000* instead.

Together with boundless energy for misbehaving, *Me* found itself in the middle of an explosion in malware, and its new, but hastily put together, *System Restore* feature made matters much worse by putting infected files into every backup.

Having been shoved aside by *Windows XP*, Microsoft stopped supporting *Me* just five years later. Good riddance to bad rubbish.

change the processor affinity of the game process from more than one core to just one. (Incidentally, *Mass Effect 2* players have reported similar slowdowns relating to processor cores. As *ME2* was released earlier this year game developers have clearly yet to fully understand the core affinity issue.)

However, given you feel your frame rate is falling off a cliff regardless of what you're playing, and given the fact you've clearly taken all the more obvious steps to try and prevent it, my suspicion is that it's heat-related. Once again I'll point the finger at the Q6600, because, together with your motherboard, it's the one core component that has remained unchanged during your efforts to thwart lag.

If it's a PC you built yourself, and one which you are confident working on, I would clean and then replace the thermal compound on the chip. Take a long, hard look at the heat-sink fan and make sure it's not just spinning freely

but is also able to drag air past the fins. If they're clogged with dust they won't pull much heat away.

Although your GeForce is new, you might still like to download GPU Caps Viewer from ozone3d.net/gpu_caps_viewer and check that the temperatures aren't running away from you there too.

If you're still stuck, update the BIOS and change your PSU. At this point in the investigation your MSI mobo is as likely an offender as the PSU, in which case you'd be better served putting the £120 you'd need to change them both towards a Core i3 or i5 system.

Q DVD GO BOOM

My Western Digital HDD failed after a disc blew up in my DVD drive. I tried reformatting but no joy. Help.

Joe Wyvern

A Try WD's tools, like Advanced Format (wdc.com/en/products/advancedformat), to repair it. [PCB](#)

FORUMS:
DIRECT FROM
DEARWANDY.COM

(Woodmaster) I just moved into a new house today and, weirdly, the TV aerial cable they've hard-wired into the house has screw thread at the end and a nut on it that doesn't unscrew. This means I can't plug it into my TV. Is there a component I need to buy to sort this or something? (madwedge) That's a satellite cable, not a TV coaxial. (Wandy) My current homes both have F connectors, which is what you're talking about here. What you were expecting is a Belling Lee connector, aka 'regular UK telly plug'. In either case the cable is the same: coaxial, and thus capable of carrying TV or satellite. You can buy F connector-to-Belling Lee adapters at Maplin.

WHAT'S A CORE?

The simplistic way to describe what effect CPU cores have is: it's like having multiple processors on one chip. When the PC runs software designed for multiple cores, each core can process data separately from others. Threading (splitting tasks into pieces and flipping between them) also allows one core to work on multiple jobs at once.



One for videomakers.
Not for gamers.

INTEL CORE I7 980X

PRICE £800 MANUFACTURER Intel WEBSITE intel.com

THIS INTEL CPU is one you don't need at a price you can't afford. But the big news with the Core i7 980X is that it's got six cores, a first for desktop PCs. And as each core has two threads, this chip has 12 logical processors.

Underpinning the 980X is a new 32nm processor die – the Gulftown – which crams 1.17 billion transistors into 2.4cm². The Lynnfield core, used in several older CPUs, including the Core i5 750, fits just 774 million into 2.96cm². Smaller transistors means more space for features, which has allowed the 980X to have a 12MB shared cache.

Despite the extra cores and the 3.33GHz clockspeed, the 980X uses the same amount of electricity as a 975

Extreme Edition, Intel's top i7 quad, meaning it's about 50% more efficient. Adding Hyper-Threading, Turbo Mode, and a triple-channel memory controller to these features, means this chip has the most advanced CPU architecture in the world.

As with previous i7 Extreme Editions the 980X requires a LGA1366 socket.

The chip's performance is on a par with the quad-core 975 in single-threaded applications. However, in video

highly threaded will see a slight boost. *World in Conflict*'s minimum frame rate saw a slight increase from 44fps on the 975 to 48fps.

The 980X doesn't have the overclocking headroom of Intel's quad cores either. Using standard voltages the 980X hits 3.9GHz, while quad i5 and i7 chips reach over 4GHz.

The other downside to this CPU involves its Turbo Mode. Intel claims when this mode is engaged the chip will

"The i7 980X delivers little or no benefit when running older games"

encoding and rendering tests – jobs that demand multi-threaded CPUs – the 980X runs at least 50% quicker.

But there's little or no difference to using this £800 CPU for games – be it older titles, like *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare*, or many of today's releases. In a few cases performance takes a hit; *DiRT 2* runs a little slower than on a 975, possibly due to the 980X's cache memory's greater latency. However, resource-intensive games that are

run at 3.6GHz when a single core is under heavy load; 3.45GHz when multiple cores are active. However, we found it ran at 3.45GHz in both cases. It's as if Intel have capped the chip's clockspeed to artificially create a marketing driven feature, rather than just be straight about the chip's speed.

Intel has certainly delivered a six-core CPU that fits inside the power envelope of the last generation of quad-core chips. The snag, seemingly as

BENCHMARKS

CPU & GPU PERFORMANCE RATES

COLIN MCRAE: DIRT 2 *	82fps
WORLD IN CONFLICT *	49fps
CRYSIS: WARHEAD	26fps
CINEBENCH *	31sec

* DirectX 11 test * DirectX 10 test * Quicker the better

always, is software support. Those designed to take advantage of multiple cores, such as video encoders, fly on this Gulftown CPU; those that aren't – like games – make the 980X an expensively worthless purchase.

Right now the best value CPU for gaming remains the Core i5 750 (issue 214, 91%). **DJ**

SPECIFICATION

LAYOUT	Six cores, 12 threads
CLOCK SPEED	3.33GHz (Turbo: 3.45GHz)
PROCESS	32nm
SOCKET	LGA1366
CACHE	12MB L3
MEMORY SUPPORT	Triple-channel DDR3



OZONE STRATO

PRICE £69.99
MANUFACTURER Strato
WEBSITE ozonegaming.com

OZONE DON'T SEEM to realise it doesn't matter how good the sound quality is, or how many twiddly bits and sound channels your expensive headphones have, if they're as uncomfortable as the Strato.

The designers of these cans seem to have forgotten that people actually have to wear the things instead of just ogling the box and saying, "Surround sound? Nice." The ear pads are circular, so they're constantly pressing

SPECIFICATION

INPUT	USB
MIC	Uni-directional
CORD	3m
WEIGHT	462g



BENCHMARKS

CPU & GPU PERFORMANCE RATES

FAR CRY 2	47fps
WORLD IN CONFLICT *	38fps
CINEBENCH *	70sec

* DirectX 10 test * CPU performance (quicker the better)

Not a great machine, but highly upgradeable.

WESTERN DIGITAL SILICONEDGE BLUE

PRICE £415 MANUFACTURER Western Digital WEBSITE wdc.com

WESTERN DIGITAL SAY this, their first solid state drive, is designed for compatibility and reliability, not speed. If this drive can deliver sustained performance, it'll be a winner.

The company also claims the drive's peak read/write figures are 250MBps/170MBps. Great news if true, and they're maintainable. Out of the box peak performance is in line with these figures with fast random

SPECIFICATION

CAPACITY	256GB
INTERFACE	SATA 3Gbps
TYPE	MLC Flash
SIZE	2.5in
CACHE	64MB DDR2
CONTROLLER	JMicon JMF612



Western Digital's first SSD.

write speeds. When it comes to long-term performance, a quick brim-and-empty showed a small fall in peak and random performance. As with any SSD, we can't give an unreserved recommendation to buy the SiliconEdge, but WD's first SSD is promising. **JL**

PCZONE 85

SCAN 3XS i3 OC

PRICE £705 MANUFACTURER Scan WEBSITE scan.co.uk

INTEL'S LATEST DUAL-CORE CPUs have made the value segment of the PCs system market crowded and confusing. This is demonstrated by the 3XS i3 OC.

This PC's Core i3 CPU is based on the latest Nehalem architecture, used in the Core i5 and i7 CPUs of today's top-end PCs. While the i3 is a dual-core chip, Hyper-Threading tech means it should outperformed older quad-core CPUs which lack it. And the chip's been overclocked to 4GHz, over 1GHz above its stock speed. That, and its DDR3 RAM, should mean it should out race other budget PCs.

However, this doesn't translate into a superior performance, as this PC runs slower than those fitted with older quad-cores from Athlon.

Much of this PC's abilities in gaming is down to its HD 5770 graphics card. Because game developers are making games designed to run on consoles using five-year old GPUs and CPUs, this £100 card is easily capable of running the most recent titles on their highest

SPECIFICATION

CPU	2.93GHz Intel Core i3
CLOCK SPEED	4GHz
MOTHERBOARD	Gigabyte H55M-UD2H
GPU	XFX 1GB HD 5770
RAM	4GB Corsair DDR3
STORAGE	Samsung 500GB HDD
OS WINDOWS 7	Home Premium 64-bit

detail settings at resolutions up to the ridiculous level of 2560x1600.

The problem is that the Core i3 CPU is unable to outperform older model CPUs, like the Athlon II X4.

That said, this system's H55M-UD2H motherboard is able to accept any CPU up to a socket 1156 Core i7 and is compatible with high-speed DDR3 RAM, so what the 3XS i3 lacks in outright performance, it makes up for in future-proofing. **DJ**

PCZONE 87

REMEMBER:
POST-IT NOTES ARE
THE NEMESIS OF
PASSWORDS

Good passwords – mixes of numbers, letters and symbols – are tough to remember. So use a proverb, swapping \$ for s, £ for e, h with #, i with !, a with @, and the number 0 for o. Don't use a password so strong and random you have to Post-It on your monitor.

Hardware Buyer

This is our favourite PC gear – both expensive and cheap

LOADED?

GRAPHICS

ASUS RADEON HD 5970

PRICE £499

uk.asus.com

The Radeon HD 5970 is the world's fastest video card, making it an obvious choice for this slot. Under that plastic shroud are two AMD RV870 GPUs, whose 4.3 billion transistors and 3,200 shader processors knock the GeForce GTX 295 out of the stadium and into the car park. Despite all this power it's not even particularly noisy when under load. If you have one of these cards you'll need at least a 600W PSU. Add another and you'll need 1KW.



PROCESSOR

INTEL CORE I7 975

PRICE £770

intel.com



The most extreme, most unlocked edition of Intel's quad core, multithreading flagship processor laughs at all modern games. The only reason not to get one is the imminent Core i7 980X, which will have six Hyper-Threading cores and 12MB Smart Cache and be even more jaw-droppingly stunning.

SCREEN

HP LP2475W

PRICE £450

hp.co.uk



You can buy a 24in widescreen monitor for £150 these days. So why would you want this one? Simple: professional H-IPS screen technology, two DVI-I ports, DisplayPort, HDMI, six USB ports, height adjust, rotate, swivel and tilt, plus 1920 x 1200 pixels to stare at. Why not buy two?

MOTHERBOARD

ASUS RAMPAGE II EXTREME

PRICE £259

uk.asus.com



ASUS claim the Rampage II Extreme is the "ultimate overclocking board", and looking at the design and specification it's hard to find a more attention-grabbing mobo. It has a massive array of tweaking tools, and you get a SupremeFX daughterboard with a X-Fi processor thrown in.

SOUNDCARD

AUZENTECH X-FI FORTE 7.1

PRICE £119

auzentech.com



As every decent motherboard has audio capabilities, soundcards are no longer a necessity for gamers. But if you're an audiophile with a mass of speakers to run the Forte 7.1 is a must buy: Dolby Digital Live, DTS Connect, even headphones and mic amps. Proper stuff.

HDD

WESTERN DIGITAL CAVIAR BLACK 2TB

PRICE £220

westerndigital.com



Forget solid state for a moment: we're after a data tanker that'll swallow music, movies and your *Steam* folder. For that there's only one choice: the WD2001FAS. Don't be fooled into thinking that large drives are slower than smaller ones. This 2TB model is top of the HDD benchmarks.

SPEAKERS

LOGITECH Z-5500

PRICE £249

logitech.co.uk



We've been advocating Logitech's THX flagship since it was launched in 2005, and although the silver plastic does tend to make it look a little dated alongside new rivals, the simple fact is that great sound never goes out of fashion. Nothing rivals the Z-5500s at this price.

SKINT?

GRAPHICS

SAPPHIRE RADEON HD 5750 VAPOR-X

PRICE £115

sapphiretech.com

While you could save yourself the cost of a game and buy NVIDIA's GTS 250, Sapphire's HD 5750 is faster, almost silent (courtesy of Vapor-X tech) and brings cool technology within reach of most gamers. Features such as DX11 support, ATI Eyefinity and DisplayPort connectivity simply aren't available on any GeForce. And thanks to CrossFire, the upgrade path is obvious: buy the same card twice.



PROCESSOR

AMD PHENOM II X4 955 BLACK

PRICE £122

amd.com



With the faster 965 Black at £139 and Core i5-750 at £152, spending that extra £30 on Intel's little belter will sure put a wider grin on your face. But when £30 could buy your hard drive, or a set of speakers, and you're on a tight budget, it has to be the Phenom.

MOTHERBOARD

GIGABYTE GA-MA770-UD3

PRICE £49

gigabyte.com.tw



Available for less than £50, GIGABYTE's GA-MA770-UD3 supports AMD's most recent AM3 processors including the Athlon II and Phenom II X4, X3, and X2, and DDR3 RAM of up to 1,666MHz. It also features RAID and onboard eight-channel HD audio, but there's no CrossFire support.

HDD

SEAGATE BARRACUDA 500GB

PRICE £33

seagate.com



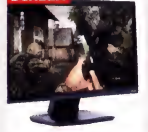
Seagate's 12th generation ST3500418AS drive costs peanuts, but a decent capacity means it'll cater for most media collections and a nod to the enthusiast market means it'll turn out some of the best benchmarks going. There are good reasons why it's the world's most popular desktop drive.

SCREEN

IYYAMA PROLITE E2208HDS-2

PRICE £134

iiyama.co.uk



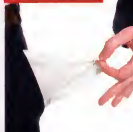
Cheap and unknown brands are often tempting, but many are based around yesterday's technology and won't support connections more exotic than a 15-pin analogue VGA. Which is why we'd go for this 22in Iiyama, with DVI-D, full HD resolution and integrated speakers.

SOUNDCARD

NONE

PRICE £0

N/A



If you're strapped for cash, the last thing you want to be wasting money on is a sound card. It's simply not necessary. Every mainstream motherboard on sale today offers multi channel audio, so hook up your speakers there instead. You'll never notice the difference.

SPEAKERS

LOGITECH X-210

PRICE £25

logitech.co.uk




Another win for Logitech, a brand people still associate with mice. The X-210s are great value, and despite looking and feeling every inch the £25 speaker set, deliver sub-assisted audio that transcends their budget status. At this price you might find classier speakers, but never a more classy sound.

VIDEOGAME CULTURE

EDGE[®]

NINTENDO | SONY | MICROSOFT | PC | HANDHELD | COIN-OP | ONLINE

MICROSOFT'S VISION OF THE FUTURE

A close-up, black and white photograph of the Kinect sensor bar. The two large, circular sensor lenses are prominent, and the white sensor bar is visible at the bottom. The background is dark, making the sensor bar stand out.

Kinect: the catalyst for
a new era in gaming,
or a 32X for 2010?

ISSUE 218 ON SALE NOW

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**PCZONE**

Freeplay

Mods, maps and free things!

DEUS EX-CELLENCE

I TRUST YOU'VE all recovered from the World Cup? What do you mean you didn't care? It's a glorious event, full of colour, excitement, and the pleasure of sitting back and laughing as the English media devours its so-called heroes whole in a frenzy of recrimination and blood-letting. It also makes writing a magazine difficult as you're constantly being distracted by events like Spain vs Honduras, or detailed discussions about the effectiveness of English referees and the advantages over using linesmen instead of Hawk-Eye.

So if you spot any sentences like "the graphics are very nice goal from Wesley Sneijder there beautiful and that was definitely a corner, ref!" please ignore them. Try to fill in the football-inspired blanks for yourself, treating articles with such mistakes as interactive experiences.

Enough with the football already, anyway. Let's talk about something in very little detail, because Will Porter covers it in a lot later on: *Deus Ex*.

I avoided *Deus Ex* when it first came out. People said it was good, but I was suspicious. (It was the same with *Half-Life* for a while.) I thought *Deus Ex* just couldn't be as great as people were saying. Controversially, I still don't think it's as wonderful as people said – and are still saying – it's just that all of its problems were rendered unimportant by the ambition shown and the chances taken.

You can forgive an awful lot in the name of innovation. Which is why I like PCs, because, generally, we're where innovation is at.

David Brown
Staff writer

CHILLY LEGS

Blood of the Cybermen? Amy's Blood of Antifreeze more like...

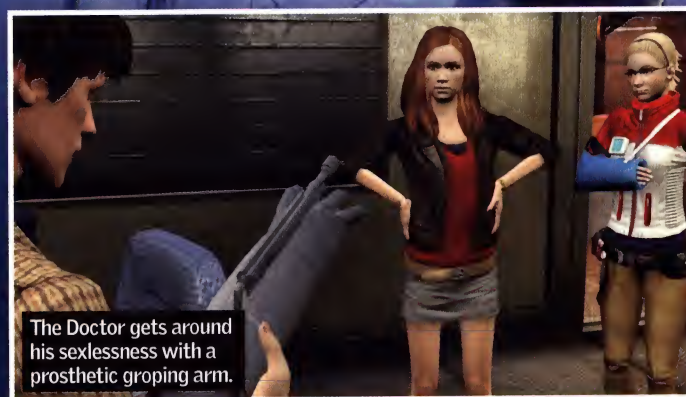
WEBSITE bbc.co.uk/doctorwho/dw/theadventuregames

THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT hearing the *Doctor Who* theme through headphones set slightly too loud that sends ice down your spine.

Some people criticise Murray Gold's new score for its unsubtle intrusions, but those first moments of the TARDIS bouncing hopelessly around in whatever that lightning tunnel is can, if you're so minded, induce fluttering, clenching and wringing of the hands, heart and buttocks, respectively.

The new free downloadable game from the BBC brings that thrill, but *Blood of the Cybermen* – the second chapter – lacks the pace and passion of the series. Of course it does, it'd take a genius animator to reproduce the alien physicality of Matt Smith's Doctor. But Gillen and Smith's acting feels unusually subdued. Perhaps they hate games. Perhaps they didn't realise such voiceover work was in their contracts. Perhaps the shit acting of the screaming guy ended up putting them off.

Anyway, once you lower your expectations from the production values of a flagship drama series, you've got a story that pays more than lip service

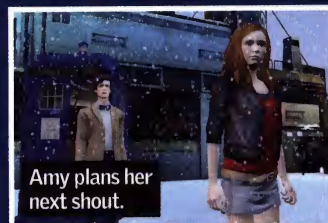


The Doctor gets around his sexlessness with a prosthetic groping arm.

to the old Doctors, and provides plenty of harmless puzzle fun for kids, who'll cheerfully allow that said lip service to sail over their heads.

ONE FOR KIDDIES

It's difficult to imagine that the people who'll push their glasses up their nose and say "Ah, Cybermats – a welcome callback to the Troughton-era *Tomb of the Cybermen*," before writing slash fiction about Amy Pond snogging The Rani will be easily enraged by a kid-friendly block sliding puzzle. You're not just solving puzzles though (which, as

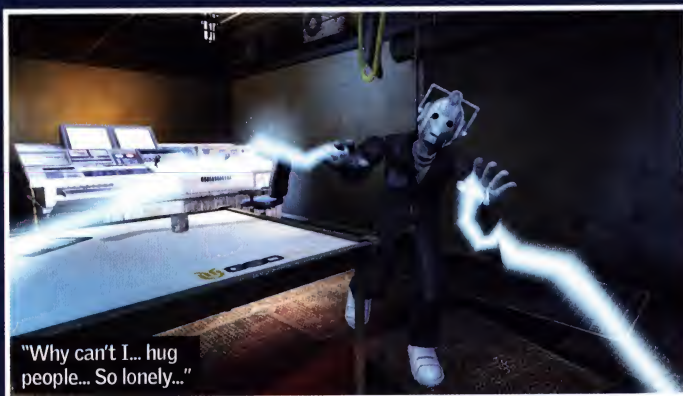


Amy plans her next shout.

we've implied, are pitched at very young children, so give very little scope for going wrong), as you're uncovering facts about the real world and the *Who* universe. (It's a BBC game, so must be a little bit educational. It's the law.)

It's a little disconcerting to see real science presented in the same fashion as the Cybermen's technology. Using the cod science of *Doctor Who* probably isn't the best way to convince people that nanotechnology is a real thing. Still, it's good to see jelly babies getting their due recognition.

Playing and enjoying *The Adventure Series* requires the following: stick with keyboard controls (the mouse is too dampened), lower your expectations, love *Doctor Who*, and keep a nine-year-old preserved in your head. Quadruple check? Then download away. **PCZ**



"Why can't I... hug people... So lonely..."

PCZONE
FREE-O-METER



Not free!

0
HOURS

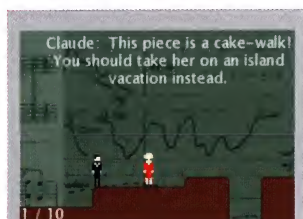
*Approximate amount of completely free stuff this month



Free!

349
HOURS*

SNIPPETS



MUSIC TO THE EARS

bit.ly/compositionpiece
Composition Piece is a 2D platformer set in a world inhabited by countless famous composers where the sky is a musical tablature. The game forces you to replay from the start if you die, so be aware of that before playing.



TANGLED UP IN BLUE

bit.ly/solitaire_entangle
A nifty little puzzler this. In Solitaire Entanglement you create as long a path as possible for your orange line before it hits a wall. It also features six-player local multiplayer.



GRIMY GRIMY

rathergood.com/unnatural
Unnatural Selection is dubbed a "life simulation" game, but it's a struggle to imagine anyone's life being as grim and horrible as this. Oh, it means life in the general sense, like stimulating worms to make them mutate. Makes sense now.



To war, brave pixel soldiers!

TWITTER WARS

DotWar puts Twitter avatars in brutal combat

WEBSITE bit.ly/dotwar_game

TWITTER MIGHT NOT be everyone's cup of tea, what with it giving rise to such exquisite time-wasters as @big_ben_clock and @the_vuvuzela, but it has stimulated the imagination of hundreds of budding developers everywhere.

A week can't go by without the appearance of an intriguing application that uses Twitter in a new way. The object of attention this time is a little web-based affair called *DotWar*, a real-time strategy game that uses your

Twitter avatar as the basis for creating your army. Enter two Twitter user names and watch as each picture dissolves into a mess of opposing pixelated warriors.

There are two ways of playing: first you can watch as the 'battle' unfolds automatically, with the two colourful armies pushing forward and attempting to destroy the three crystals on the enemy's side of the window. Troops behave according to what colour their pixel was in the original picture. Dark colours are slower, defensive units that funnel the attackers down certain paths, while lighter colours ones scamper about quickly, trying to break through the defences of the opposing force.

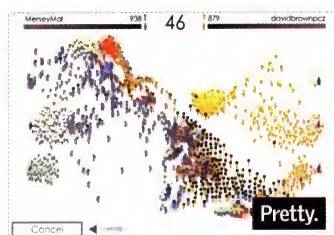
You can also attempt to control the flow of units manually, although it seems to be a bit hit and miss as to whether what you want to happen actually does. Ignore that though, and there's a really

good time waster here, with endless variations upon a single theme.

Experimenting with pitching your avatar against your friends', and seeing how your pictures' make up changes the outcome is fascinating. Green avatars seem the best, but if there's too much solid green, orange soldiers ones will overrun the centre.

Each match will be the same if you replay them, but keep mixing and matching your opponents and you'll be stuck in *DotWar* for a long while. And once you think you can beat anyone, try playing @killkillkill111.

"An intriguing application that uses Twitter in a new way"



A SEVEN YEAR ITCH

Prepare to enter *The Real World*

WEBSITE bit.ly/realworldmod

WHAT COULD YOU do in seven years? Almost have played in three World Cups, for a start. Have one year spare after completing a part-time PhD, that's another. If you're the creators of *Max Payne: Kung Fu Edition 3* and *Katana*, you could spend that time creating what they describe as "the most explosive and complete *Matrix* mod to ever grace the *Max Payne* engine."

Even now the creators still aren't happy, wanting to include more and more features, improve old ones and refine things to an infinite degree. However, realism

has finally struck and they've made the decision to actually release something. Instead of just shoving a beta out into the world, they're going with the dribble method, releasing chunks of the game in episodes. The aim is to have the first pack at least released by the end of 2010. Although after seven years, a few more months won't make much difference.

The first pack, *Neophyte*, presents players with the ability to control Neo



(Keanu Reeves' character) and gives him all sorts of kung fu moves and dodges, guns, SWAT and police enemies, plus the men-in-black agents, to play around with. Levels will include the Dojo, where Neo sparred with Morpheus, plus the Lobby, Rooftop Assault, Subway Battle and a street chase.

The Real World will have to do something brilliant to impress after so many years in development, but the fingers that have been crossed for so long remain so. Once it's eventually released, we'll give it a ruthless playtest, and tell you whether this mod is akin to the first, second or third film in terms of quality.

"I'll get you Keanu!"

EVERY DARK CLOUD...

Activision say *The Silver Lining* can exist after all

WEBSITE tsl-game.com

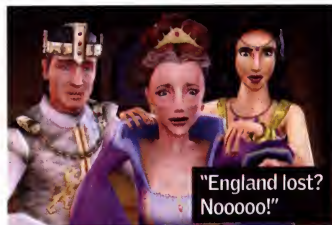
SOMETIMES THE LITTLE guy wins. Usually he doesn't, getting trampled into the mud by the bigger man, but sometimes he manages to fling a lucky rock into the temple of the brutes assaulting him. This is a biblical explanation of what's happened to *The Silver Lining*, the fan-made game inspired by the *King's Quest* series. It was heading for a Goliath-esque fall, only to come up David.

For eight years, the team at Phoenix Online have been slowly putting together

TSL, until they made a *King's Quest* game. Then Activision, owners of the *King's Quest* licence, sent their lawyers in.

All seemed lost as Bobby Kotick did an erotic money dance while draped in the disgorged entrails of the weeping Phoenix Online team (maybe). However, it seems that somewhere in the bowels of Activision, there lies a person with compassion, for an agreement has been reached and *The Silver Lining* has been cleared for take off. How long it will stay there is a mystery.

However, after using the power of popular opinion to banish publishing demons for the best part of eight years, Phoenix are nearing completing *TSL*. There remains but one question: will the little guy make it or will another giant weapon swing into play and lop his tiny legs off? Let's hope the former, because



there's only so many times you can make David and Goliath jokes before they get tiresome. It'll be interesting to see what the team will go onto after this, a new *Gabriel Knight* perhaps?

"In the bowels of Activision, there lies a person with compassion"



Graham's looking pretty old.

UT-TWOSOME

Modders split *UT3*'s screen

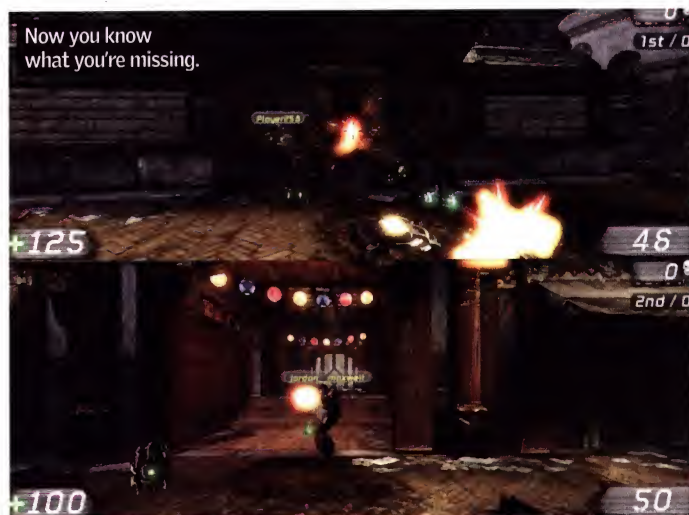
WEBSITE bit.ly/ut3split

LURKING DEEP WITHIN *Unreal Tournament 3*'s PC code is the split-screen mode for the PlayStation 3's version. Naturally, modders have decided to figure out a way to implement it on PCs.

And so they have, though it's not necessarily easy to get running. You'll need a control pad for the other player to use and you'll need to enter into the murky world of console commands. Enter 'DebugCreatePlayer 1' to spawn

a second player. Once you've done that, you need to set up your controllers, a tutorial on how to do this can be found here: bit.ly/ut3split_tut.

For more information, or if the simplified instructions we've given here don't work, visit the Summary page at bit.ly/ut3split for an explanation that involves .dll files and all that sort of thing. Remember, go easy on the pad user—it's not his fault a gamepad isn't cut out for the task in hand.



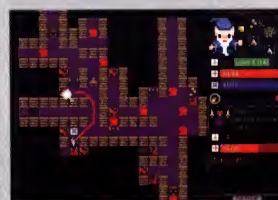
SNIPPETS



HARPING ON

extlabs.com/geo-duck

If you've ever dreamt of going on a quest for pearls at the behest of a cute little clam that arms you with musical instruments and provides NSFW moments, *Geo Duck* is for you.



ROGUELIKE-A-LIKE

bit.ly/desktopdungeon

Rodain Joubert has updated *Desktop Dungeons*, his freeware roguelike that appeared earlier this year. A shiny new interface, a tutorial and an unlockable campaign mode are now included.

Bug Fix of the Month



THIS MONTH
DIN'S CURSE
BETA PATCH
v1.002

"Summoned chaos lords no longer make stomping noises."

Demos

Adam Glick on what's on your disc



MASS EFFECT 2

Blast into space with this huge interstellar demo...

WEBSITE masseffect.bioware.com

HERE'S A CHALLENGE for you people, there's a fun little movement going around in the *Mass Effect 2* community called The Adventures of Ugly Shepard (bit.ly/uglyshepard). So the task we're setting you is to create the most grotesque and horrible Shepard possible. There might even be a prize for the person who disgusts us the most with their mangled effort. Anyway, that's an aside.

If you haven't had the chance to play *Mass Effect 2* yet, you've probably got no money, because surely if you did, you'd have spunked it on this fine game.

To make you salivate and castigate your lack of funds even more, this demo gives you the first two full missions of the game, where newcomers to Shepard et al will get a refresher course on *Mass Effect* history by the mysterious Illusive Man, none other than Martin Sheen. That should be incentive enough to get this demo into your PC, to be honest...

Conceals a face of pure horror.



PROBLEM ZONE

Trouble with your DVD? Help is at hand!

1. If the menu doesn't appear when the disc spins up, open the Run command from the Start menu and enter D:\pcz.exe (D is the DVD drive's letter).
2. If you have a problem with a specific demo or application, check the DVD's Help section. Also ensure your PC's drivers and DirectX version are up-to-date.
3. If that doesn't work check our forums at pczone.co.uk for fixes, or send an email to us at letters@pczone.com. Please describe the problem, what you were doing when it occurred, any error messages that came up, and your system's details.
4. If the DVD itself is faulty, send it and an SAE to Disc Department, Reader Support, Future Publishing Ltd, Bath, BA1 2BW, to get a new one.

We can only provide assistance with technical problems directly related to our cover DVD. The PC ZONE discs have been tested and certified virus free by an independent organisation. We recommend that you always run an up-to-date virus checker on any software before running it. Future Publishing Ltd cannot accept any responsibility for disruption, damage and/or loss to your data or your computer system that may occur while using these discs, the programs or the data on them. Ensure that you have backups of data contained on your hard drives before running any new software.



MEMORY ALPHA

Those of you unfamiliar with the *Mass Effect* story can educate themselves through this skippable recap provided by the game's big-name star Martin Sheen.



AN OZZY AFFAIR

Sheen comes back for a second time, talking to a delectable Australasian lady about none other than yours truly. It seems you've been sent to kill some Geth.

THE BIG SLEEP...



MS JOKER

Things happen, we won't say what, and you'll wake up on a slab. Hopefully you'll look better than the abomination we managed to create. She looks like a female Wayne Rooney.



DON'T PANIC!

Something's gone wrong and your ship is getting blasted by weird alien lasers. It's your job to take charge and try to save the crew. What decisions will you make?

LEGO HARRY POTTER

Trudging through their first years

WEBSITE games.kidswb.com/official-site/lego-harry-potter/

EVER SINCE SHE 'went legal', adult males (and some females) around the world have been able to breathe sighs of relief, as their Hermione fantasies became no longer worthy of screaming *Daily Mail* headlines causing gangs of vigilantes to toss

stones covered in dog shit through their bedroom windows.

Whether they'd turn their affections towards a plastic, stubby-legged version of her seen in this LEGO game is unlikely, but you never know some people. It's come to our attention that Adam Glick is fond of a bit of Ron action, claiming to have penned an extremely disturbing erotic fan fiction story where Harry's mate is covered in honey. The mind boggles.

The demo? You get to do amusing LEGO-y things while you control the trainee mages.



Why did it take so long to mix magic and LEGO?

MAGIC CAST



HERMIONE

If we were made out of LEGO, we'd be jumping her plastic bones. Now it's legal.



RON

The ginger-nuttet clod has taken a restraining order on one Mr A. Glick.

METIN 2

MMO for your lack of money

WEBSITE metin2.co.uk/

THERE ARE HELL of a lot of free-to-play MMOs out there now and it's fair to say most of them are dross. *Metin 2* manages to sidestep the usual fantasy gubbins by giving it an Eastern twist.

The game also throws in martial arts and mounted combat, games with horses that aren't Pippa Funnell-inspired, are always OK with us. You can

also become the ruler of your own castle or choose to join the cause of one of three different emperors.

Metin 2 won't beat *World of Warcraft*, but it's worth a go. So if you're yet to dip your toe, or indeed any part of yourself, into the streaming waters of the free MMO scene, here's your chance.



1. BABES

Face it: *Metin 2* wouldn't be a fantasy MMO without scantily clad women.

2. BEARS

Is this grizzly dancing? He certainly looks like he's busting some impressive moves!

3. BARS

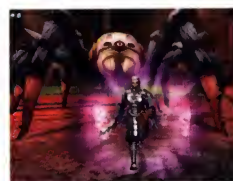
As you'd expect, you'll soon be filling your task bar with hundreds of icons for potions, spells and whatnot.

EVIL WALKS



DRAGONS

You're supposed to fight the scale-covered beasts, not run away in terror. Although running is sensible.



SPIDERS

You wouldn't want to see one of these guys coming out of your plughole, let alone have them sneak up behind you.

BEST OF THE REST



A bunch of other stuff you'll find on your disc, if you click hard and fast enough, that is...



NIGHT TRAIN

xportmedia.co.uk/games.html

Explore the memories of a woman as she travels on the titular train. This indie first-person adventure is part of a series of short stories.



TENNIS ELBOW 2011

managames.com/tennis

All the furry ball walloping you could hope for in this shareware demo of the long-running indie tennis game. Clay, grass, you can smoke anything.



BAGGAGE

bit.ly/baggage_game

The only thing worse than running to catch a plane is having to collect scattered luggage first, like in this 2D platformer with weird visuals.



MAGLEV

bit.ly/maglev_game

Celebrate the work of some students by playing the demo of this UDK-created game about robots and magnetism.

HOT
DOWNLOADS
PCZONE

TENNIS ELBOW MANAGER

managames.com/tennismanager

If the action game doesn't satisfy your Wimbledon-inspired soul, then perhaps you might want to venture into the world of tennis coaching. Pick a player, then tell him how to swing his racket around.



ASTRODRILLER 3020 DEMO

bit.ly/astrodriller3020

This oddball puzzler has you guiding asteroids into bins by drawing lasers they can roll along. The longer the space rocks stay on beams, the higher the bonuses you earn. A decent distraction.





Freeware

Rick Lane refuses to pay for anything

ON THE DVD

PCZONE

In this month's tour of the best (and worst) of the free, run along the backs of gargantuan monsters; go old-school with a side-scrolling shooter; leap over spikes trying to discover the meaning of life; go through the soul-destroying experience that's commuting to work; and join a lethal game show.

RICK'S PICK



HYDORAH

DEVELOPER Locomalito
WEBSITE bit.ly/Hydorah

THIS IS THE game equivalent of John Smith's in that it's a no-nonsense game, not because it tastes like concentrated cat's piss. *Hydorah* is a proud echo of '80s arcade games, a side-scrolling space shooter in which you have to defend Earth's colonies against invasion by a wonderfully weird extraterrestrial force that's straight out of Saturday morning children's TV.

The game is both frantic fun and bloody difficult, as a single hit results in your vacuum-packed death. So unless you're lucky enough to pick up a shield boost, quick reflexes are your only defence against the alien onslaught.

Throw in some ridiculously big bosses and even bigger weapons and you've got a brilliant little throwback to the decade of colourful sprites and shoulder pads.

The first machine to catch a cold.

HEIR

A truly monstrous battle awaits

DEVELOPER Locomalito WEBSITE bit.ly/heirgame

DESPITE THE FACT that it rips off *Shadow of the Colossus* on the PlayStation 2, and has a poor story centred around quotes from Rudyard Kipling's poem *If*, *Heir* is an enjoyable little platformer.

You play as a Pale Man, a warrior from the north of the kingdom of Sofia. He answers the call of a dying king to rid his land of three titanic monsters, and is promised the throne on the monarch's death as a reward if he succeeds.

The most impressive aspect of *Heir* is its sense of scale. At the start of the first mission you leap off a cliff, and the camera zooms out to reveal the titan you'll be taking on. The levels take place on the bodies of these massive



A mistimed jump means a long fall to your death.



Monsters are draped in conveniently placed weeds.

monsters, with eyebrows, pimples and other protrusions acting as the platforms. The objective is to find the monster's weak spot, highlighted by a convenient cone of ethereal light.

The creator of the game, Anthony Lavella, clearly has a sense of style. The camera tilts and wobbles effectively as you progress, and the accompanying music is fittingly epic.

Having said that, the artwork could be improved and, as already mentioned, the superfluous Kipling quotes make the game feel a little smug, though nothing like as much as the two games on the next page.

Although it's only three levels long, *Heir* is definitely worth 30 minutes of your time. And it has a neat cliffhanger ending that suggests a second game is



"The most impressive aspect of *Heir* is its sense of scale"

Argh! My foot!

LOVED

Pretentious game alert

DEVELOPER Alexander Ocias WEBSITE bit.ly/loved_game

ON HIS WEBSITE Alexander Ocias, the creator of this game, says he "wanted to create something confrontational, that would engage players to give thought to what they do both in and out of the game." What his work of art boils down to is a black

blob jumping over spikes, and not particularly well.

In fairness there are some interesting ideas housed in this little game. As you progress it offers you a series of choices – whether you're a man or a woman, and whether you're excited or apprehensive at meeting your elusive lover at the game's end.

Loved also commands you to do certain things like jump into a pit of spikes. Whether you actually do so or not is up to you, but all of your decisions will have an effect on how the game will end.

Loved suffers from being too clever for its own good. The controls are clumsy, your character feels like he's floating rather than jumping, and the level design is unimaginative.

Jump over that pit of **barbs**.

Or I could just stay right here.

This game has big ideas and is certainly worth playing, but big ideas need solid foundations, and *Loved* lacks in this department.

Checkpoints erupt with sparks when you pass.

EVERYDAY THE SAME DREAM

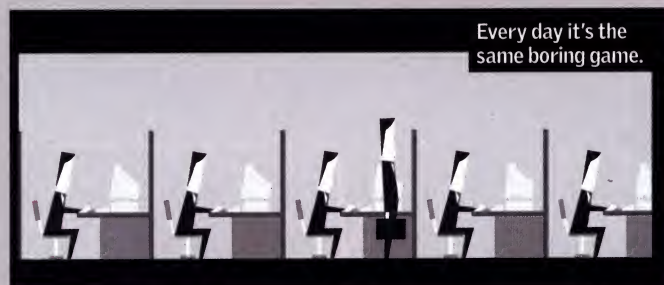
Obvious statement: commuting is dull

DEVELOPER Lamolleindustria WEBSITE bit.ly/everydaythesamedream

THIS GAME IS easily the most pretentious you'll ever have the misfortune to be sneered at by. Self-satisfaction and smugness ooze out of its every juncture. And, for that extra slap in the face, it barely counts as a real game.

Centred on a man's daily commute to his office, *ETSD* has you repeat the same journey several times, carrying out a (limited) variety of tasks each time – including patting a cow and catching a leaf and staring at it – which are supposed to be deeply meaningful in some way. Controls are limited to moving left and right and pressing

No, you can't, so don't ask.



space to interact with a miniscule number of objects. Essentially this supposed game is Reginald Perrin's soul-destroying daily commute, minus the insight, satire and humour.

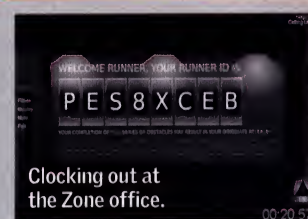
ETSD's creators claim it's about alienation and the refusal of labour, which is ironic considering you are forced to do everything before you can progress.

Finally, the ending is far too sudden and underwhelming.

At least *Loved* makes a decent attempt at being clever. *ETSD*'s makers merely assume it's a work of genius because you can stand in a lot of quiet places doing sod all, as that's clearly what all intellectual people do.



WEBGAME OF THE MONTH



Clocking out at the Zone office.

EXIT PATH

DEVELOPER Armour Games WEBSITE bit.ly/exitpath

THIS IS A fast-paced platformer that encourages smooth and speedy progression through each level.

You play as an unnamed escapee in a *Running Man*-esque game show complete with spotlights, cheering crowds and deadly traps. You must sprint, jump and slide your way through each stage as cleanly as possible, the reward for which is a massive speed boost activated by pressing the spacebar.

The presentation of *Exit Path* is excellent, particularly the rewind effect when you die (which happens a lot if you're rubbish). While there's nothing massively new here, the quality of the production and pace of its gameplay make *Exit Path* an intensely addictive freebie.

Extend

The latest unofficial mods, maps and add-ons



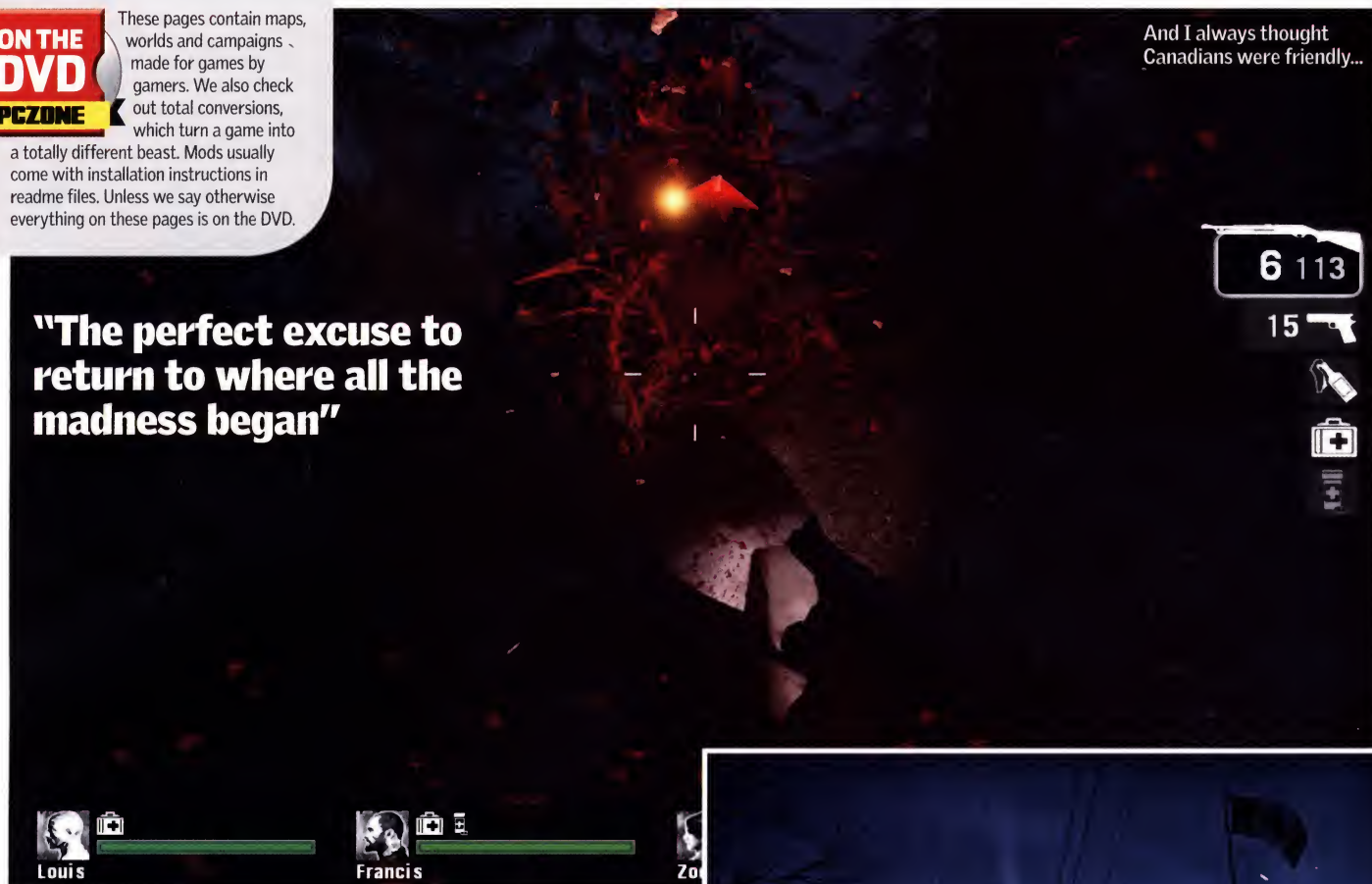
ON THE
DVD

PCZONE

These pages contain maps, worlds and campaigns made for games by gamers. We also check out total conversions, which turn a game into a totally different beast. Mods usually come with installation instructions in readme files. Unless we say otherwise everything on these pages is on the DVD.

"The perfect excuse to return to where all the madness began"

And I always thought Canadians were friendly...



I HATE MOUNTAINS

Listen to Francis moan once more...

MOD FOR Left 4 Dead [WEBSITE ihatemountains.com](http://WEBSITE.ihatemountains.com)

SOME IDIOTS ARE still making new maps for *Left 4 Dead*. Except *I Hate Mountains* isn't made by idiots: it comes from the creators of the excellent *Portal: Prelude* (portalprelude.com). The question before us is whether this belated mod for *L4D* is worth going to the trouble of re-downloading the game from *Steam*.

Although *I Hate Mountains* isn't as brilliant as *Prelude*, the campaign does sport fantastic level design. It's a complete five-map campaign, and each map is a substantial length, so there's definitely a couple of hours worth of play to be had. In addition, all the maps are different, with gradual transitions between areas. Beginning in a woodland landscape, you have to make your way



through an overrun hilltop manor house, navigate expansive catacombs, and a lumberjack's yard before the intense lakeside finale, which comes complete with impressive new lightning effects.

I Hate Mountains is as good as anything Valve have come up with,

although the new ambient sounds mean it can be a bit fiddly to get working. But if you're tired of Rochelle and long to stare perverted at Zoey's blemished face then *I Hate Mountains* is the perfect excuse to return to where all the madness began.

Stormtroopers: second only to Nazis for best cannon fodder.

DARK FORCES

Giving *Dark Forces* an old engine

MOD FOR Jedi Academy WEBSITE darkforces.jediknight.net

FIRST THE BAD news—this total conversion for *Jedi Knight: Jedi Academy* has been in development for eight years and, although its makers are still working away to get the mod complete, it's doubtful that it'll ever see the light of day in a fully fledged form.

On the plus side, a meaty six-level demo is available to download and it's good. In fact it's just like playing the original *Dark Forces*, only with full 3D Stormtroopers.

The first mission remains one of the most disorienting pieces of level design in existence, and the charred corpses strewn across the Talay Tak Base still

evoke a strangely nostalgic sense of horror and revulsion.

One thing that sticks out in particular is that the gun-play is much better than the notoriously mediocre pre-lightsaber missions from *Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast*. It's a relief that the exhilarating shootery of the 1995 original hasn't been lost in the engine transition. The *Quake III* engine might be creaky now, but it can still render Stormtroopers well enough.

If the *Dark Forces* team can complete the enormous task they set themselves a decade ago, this'll be an excellent mod. But there's still a huge way to go before that happens.

NEHRIM: AT FATE'S EDGE

Warning: Sharp destiny ahead

MOD FOR Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion WEBSITE nehrim.de

THIS MOD IS about as total as a total conversion can get. *Nehrim: At Fate's Edge* boasts a landmass nearly equal to *Oblivion's*, only entirely hand-crafted compared to *Oblivion's* largely generated landscapes; an original orchestral score; and a completely new story with lore wholly distinct from the *Elder Scrolls*. After four

years of development, SureAI's magnum opus mod is finally available for download.

Nehrim is fundamentally different from its parent in numerous ways: it's a story-driven adventure that focuses on a quest that's roughly three times longer than *Oblivion's*. Although the game isn't linear by any means. There are no guilds to join, but 30 side quests accompany the expansive main plot, and exploration is further encouraged by making powerful weapons, armour and spells unavailable from shops, and only found in the mines, tombs and dungeons dotted around the world.

The dungeons are worth exploring just for the sake of seeing them. Like the



Sieht aus wie die erbauer sind hier.

POST SCRIPT

Lost in the post

MOD FOR Half-Life 2 WEBSITE moddb.com/mods/post-script

THIS IS A typical example of a modder with big ideas, but lacking the ability to put them into pixels. *Post Script* is a post-apocalyptic adventure game involving a complex and intriguing relationship between the protagonist and a mysterious character named Celeste, who believes the apocalypse to be the player's fault.

The story is potentially interesting, but as the mod is incredibly short the narrative is far too vague. Another part of this problem is that the writing is patchy. Things start well but become more turgid and clumsy as the plot progresses. The level design also leaves a lot to be desired, it feels bland and blocky with too many artificial borders.

That's not to say *Post Script* is awful. Visual and aural effects are used hauntingly well, and the atmosphere of living in a lonely, lifeless world is captured almost perfectly.

Interestingly, rather than plough on with the story, the creator Lewis Denby is remaking this episode before continuing. If the aforementioned problems can be sorted out, the next rendition of *Post Script* could be very good indeed.



Burnley, after renovations.

So here we are. Enjoy your sweet surroundings, cherub. They won't last for long.



Neue abenteuer sind nie gut ausgestattet.

landscape, *Nehrim's* underground lairs put *Oblivion's* to shame. The opening level (a cavernous mine filled with complex architecture and contraptions) is indicative of the quality throughout.

But there's a problem with *Nehrim*: it's in German. Aside from the language

barrier (the main reason *Nehrim* isn't on this issue's DVD) the only other issue is that due to the enormous environments, the frame-rate can become sluggish. Having said that, the mod doesn't degenerate into a slow stutter, even on its highest settings.

MAP MAKING LEFT 4 DEAD 2

Nick Brakespear continues making zombies out of a hammer

MOD-FOR Left 4 Dead 2 [WEBSITE l4d.com](http://www.l4d.com)



Zombie is late!
Run zombie! Run!

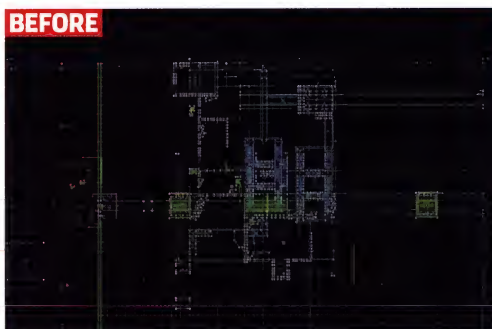
I BUILT A castle. These four words imply simplicity, when in truth they represent five weeks of solid work, sleepless nights, and now, permanently bloodshot eyes.

I've come a long way since the simple orange boxes and flawed prototypes of my early work. I've mastered the arcane rites of portal flow, the intricacies of the logic_case, and the almighty power of the Nav Mesh. And yet, as far as I've come, I'm still building boxes. My level, in all its gothic grandeur, resides within a gigantic box whose walls and ceiling are concealed by the illusionary powers of the skybox (see *Sky High*).

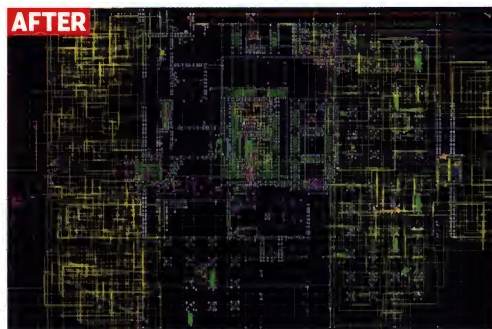
The buildings within this mega-box are simple, square creations. World geometry, and the processing of it, is complicated in the Source Engine. The engine's struggle with rendering increases with any chunk of scenery that isn't at a neat right angle. Like 1,000 candles casting a million shadows, a simple eight-sided tube can cripple the Source Engine's visibility rendering process. The more complex the shape, the more the engine will

MASTERING THE GRID

BEFORE



AFTER



These fluorescent grids are a top-down wireframe view of the map. In the beginning, the map is limited to blue and green lines representing brush geometry (walls etc). As the map progresses, the geometry becomes more complex as the level is filled with props (the yellow boxes) and assorted point entities (purple splotches).

struggle to account for each silhouette, each angle, and their effects on visibility.

To get around this, most official levels use a huge number of props: pre-made entities, such as doors and trees, that don't affect these calculations. As each of these must be placed by hand, I opted for a minimalist approach. After all, these are ruins, not fully-furnished luxury apartments.

On this note, while skyboxes can create dramatic, detailed landscapes, in my case I rendered the sky pitch black. Following through on my previous idea to implement darkness as a means to bypass the necessity of detail, a pitch-black sky not only serves my purposes in this sense, but also helps to create an oppressive atmosphere. Blackness is heavy, and for much of the level the

world will only be revealed to the survivors through the circle of light cast by their torches.

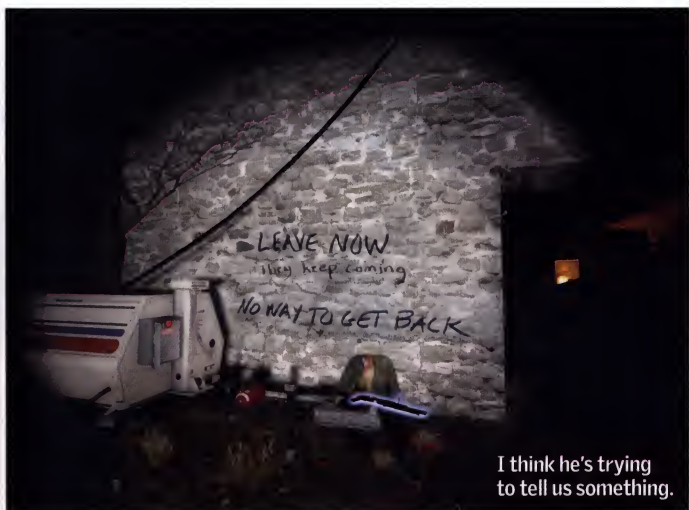
CUE ZOMBIES

A level with no lighting at all would be lazy, and rather confusing, so as a compromise I play with fire, positioning camp fires throughout the ruins. This leads to a new idea: like the safe rooms

SKY HIGH

The art of looking up and around

In its basic form, a skybox is a massive box whose internal surfaces are covered with sky and horizon textures. A player is usually placed in the centre of the box, which follows them, so they always see the illusion of a distant sky. Advanced games, such as *Half-Life 2*, have skyboxes that contain miniature landscapes, complete with buildings, clouds, and the blinking lights of distant vehicles.



I think he's trying to tell us something.

and quiet corners of Valve's maps, lighting on this level would serve as a refuge, giving the survivors a measure of safety – but at a cost.

Just like with the pipe bomb, light and sound would attract a horde of zombies. Though it takes me two days of hard labour, learning and swearing, I successfully construct the first of several portable generators that, when used, turn on floodlights, replete with beams and sounds. A couple of seconds after this, a horde will appear, and the apparent safety of the bright light is then tested.

The castle structures took two weeks to complete. With lighting and AI pathfinding on their way to being

completed, I made the decision to attempt a simple Finale level, and so make a complete, if short, campaign.

ENDING THE GAME

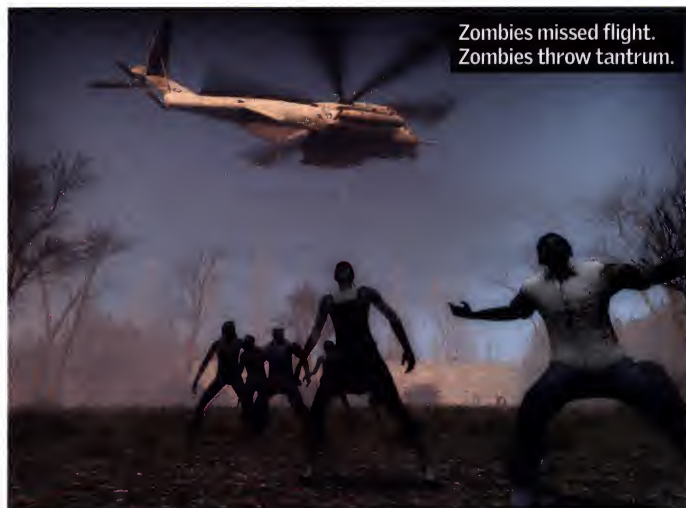
Rather than building a new level from scratch, I saved time by inverting the existing map: the ruins themselves become the setting for the finale, lit by morning light.

I toyed with a variety of ideas for the survivors' evacuation from trucks pulling up at the entrance, to fuel being loaded into a car, but in the end settle for what turns out to be the most complicated option: the helicopter.

Necessity really is the father of invention, and the sheer size of the



Ruuuun! Get to da choppa!



Zombies missed flight. Zombies throw tantrum.



Beautiful views. Slight case of undeath.

helicopter demanded a significant redesign of the ruins. As the chopper couldn't fit into them, a new tower emerged from the empty area I'd planned to use for its landing spot. Then I made a church with an accompanying graveyard that could act as a landing area for the aircraft.

The two levels continue to grow in this manner for another week: changing in an almost organic response to every new problem that came up or idea I had. As much as their contents started as a mass of independent components, by this point everything is connected, which meant that any change that was made demanded another.

By week four, playtests of the early two-level campaign began. Players are devious little shits, so within the first few minutes of the first test exploitable flaws were revealed. Much swearing ensues, in private, and is further fuelled by the subsequent revelation of the

expected (but still dreaded) array of bugs and glitches that accompany any new construction.

To say that eventually worked out would be both entirely true and horribly inaccurate. As the final two weeks of production crawled by in a line-dance of steps forward and back, the backward steps cause me to stumble many times. Game-breaking flaws were revealed in major features, and I blasted through more fixes than in the previous weeks combined. But in the end, it does all work out.

Now the bugs and their fixes become less frequent, and all that's left to do is implement some HDR lighting – and unleash a final touch, a series of features to unsettle and surprise even veteran zombie-killers, and adapt this map for Versus play. **PET**

DIY

What you'll need...

- A Source Engine game (*Half-Life 2*, *Left 4 Dead 2*, *Portal* etc)
- The games' SDK (downloadable from Steam)
- Access to the tutorials at developer. valvesoftware.com/wiki.
- An abundance of time. Making a good level takes weeks of man-hours; a Valve-quality one, months.

"By week four, playtests of the early two-level campaign began"

Online Zone

What's new in *PC ZONE*'s forum and Fight Club

Come and take on the Zone Staff in our monthly online gaming free-for-all!

Cobbled streets and dusty Arabian cityscapes were the venue for our monthly free-for-all, while the forum dwellers puzzled over the latest *World of Warcraft* saga. Twitter was its usual strange self and people talking to each other has never been so interesting, especially if you happen to have a fondness for Fudge bars and space ship games.

tw@tter

Tweeting like a bird



DRIVING AN AMBULANCE around London is an irritating job, what with having to listen to that bloody siren all day. Thankfully, we have an answer: go to bit.ly/ambulanceride to see the brilliant idea a random internet user had for making the work of a paramedic a far more light-hearted experience.

We've also offered you the chance to be an in-game character for a "major publisher", but some of you thought you were too dull or old. Martin Sheen's old and he's in a great game! Christopher Lee is decrepit and he recently released a metal album! You're as old as you feel and if you want to be in a game, despite sweaty dew flaps or sagging pectoral muscles, then so be it. The next Gordon Freeman will just have to look a bit like a middle-aged man with chronic psoriasis.

Elsewhere, why not escape humdrum teen vampire flicks, and the anger provoked when you realise how much those twunts are getting paid, by watching the trailer for Sly Stallone's new '80s action homage, *The Expendables*. It's got nothing to do with games (until some company puts together a terrible third-person blaster based on it) but it's the only film we've really want to see. And to think Seagal turned it down! More next month – just follow @pczone!

FIGHT CLUB

The Zoners head for Dusty Roads



FULL MARKS IF you spotted the wrestling reference in the title there, by the way. Fight Club this month came to you from a selection of classic maps, starting with de_cbble before moving on to the delights of cs_office and then the AWP-through-the-double-doors-hell of de_dust2 in *Counter-Strike: Source*. Luckily, most of you are too rubbish to pick people off through the minute gap, so throughout the maps a good, even battle was had.

Dust2 was the most unbalanced, with the terrorist team winning every single round, but it was still always close and only once ever felt like a procession, the terrorist team rushing the CT spawn with P90s and auto-shotguns.

The many choke points of de_cbble greeted our combatants first, with the defending counter-terrorists holding off their aggressors with an 8-2 victory. Special mention has to go to Dracon and Moon-Light, topping their teams respective leader boards by a distance.

Dracon even managed the impressive feat of not ever once dying, obtaining 18 kills to zero deaths. Hats off to you, sir. David also held his own, an extraordinary 18 kills to four deaths,



surprising even Fight Club regular Flatline, who marvelled at his head-popping skills. Naturally, that good run fell apart in the next map, cs_office.

OFFICE WORK

This was RaZor – Square Go's time to shine, leading the CTs on a blood-fuelled rampage through the heart of the terrorist defences. Only the curiously stationary dUcKers put up any real

resistance, always seeming to be the last player left in a round, staring into a wall for most of the time before springing into action. Hey, if it works, it's not our place to knock it. If it wasn't for him, those hostages would have been out the door every single round.

From holding out in the long corridor of cs_office to the flying grenades and flashbangs of de_dust2. Rushing bomb site B seemed to be the order of the day, the CTs unable to counter the massed sunglass-sporting hordes of killers bearing down upon them.

Despite the valiant efforts of RaZor – Square Go, who even swapped to the CT side to make things fairer, the terrorists carried the game without losing a single round.

Things moved on to the group photo finale of de_piranesi, where the players massed on the battlements (even though some didn't seem to know what the word meant). After the picture was taken, they hurled themselves over the parapet and onto the cold, harsh ground below. It was a fitting end to a good night's fighting.



NOTES FROM THE FORUM

Blizzard want to make their forumites use their real names...

SUNSCRAMBLE: That's an interesting move from a game developer/publisher, cleaning up their forums by completely removing anonymity. I wonder if it'll become a trend? In my own humble opinion, well, stick it this way: I'll never post on those forums again. I'm not particularly fond of the idea that anybody who Googles my real name might first-and-foremost find my rants relating to the trials and tribulations of "being an elf on the internet" to have a good nose through.

PEACHFUZZ: I think it's brilliant. I'm not a member, but I'm going to sign up as soon as my deed poll name change to Cockslap Afetidquim is complete.

DOGEN_D_DERRIBLE: Strange to see the devs behind a role-playing game being so prescriptive when it comes to their forum. Obviously, when I say role-playing game I really mean it lets you play as a transgender elf with purple hair and run around the Barrens in your underwear. Anonymity has always

been one of the things that makes the 'net so much fun.

JONNY_P66: I got instantly banned from *World of Warcraft* for typing "LF A Boy, penis length to waist size ratio must be greater than 0.3 /w me" into trade chat.

SUNSCRAMBLE: Most forum-goers are already well aware that Blizzard don't know what the fuck they're doing half the time.

DR_DARK: If they go through with this and retain any users, it'll just go to show that said users are completely stupid.

SHAKERMAKER07: Surely with all the social networking crap around this doesn't make too much difference? Most people's details are up on the internet anyway.

DR_DARK: I'd love to frolic around naked in some hot springs with the lot of you.



Who needs anonymity?

CAN'T MAKE FIGHT CLUB?

If you find yourself unable to make it to Fight Club – perhaps you've been eaten by a whale and are living on a diet of plankton – please feel free to join other PCZ readers on the following public servers.

WHO'S WHO

David Brown [PCZ]plughead
Phil Wand [PCZ]peoplesfrontofjudea
Jon Blyth [PCZ]log
Steve Hogarty [PCZ]misterbrilliant
Will Porter [PCZ]batsphinx

BATTLEFIELD 2

85.236.100.48:16567

COD 4: MODERN WARFARE

85.236.100.48:28960

COUNTER-STRIKE: SOURCE

85.236.100.48:27015

DAY OF DEFEAT: SOURCE

85.236.100.48:27315

HALF-LIFE 2: DEATHMATCH

85.236.100.48:27215

TEAM FORTRESS 2

85.236.100.48:27115

BAD COMPANY 2

Look for "PC ZONE" in the server browser.

SERVERS PROVIDED BY...



MULTIPLAY

ZONE CHAT

Forgotten Realms



"My nipples explode with delight."



WHOOPS, NEARLY FORGOT to drop in this month. Thanks go to TheTingler for prodding us about it. Too busy with screenshots and words and things like that, you see.

We were greeted by a Monty Python quote, which warmed our cold cockles. After this, people talked about *Monkey Island 2 Special Edition* (page 80) and how only a fool wouldn't pre-order it.

Useful Dave commented that he had "not had a Fudge bar in ages", which is always a useful bit of information to have.

Elsewhere, *M*A*S*H* took time out from saving the lives of US soldiers in Korea to attack another chatter for claiming the '80s film *Wargames* was shit. The more sensible people in the room were continuing their discussion of point-and-click adventures, lamenting *Discworld's* difficulty level. Suddenly, someone mentioned *Freespace 2* and the room burst into a frenzy, Useful Dave shouting "DIVE DIVE DIVE!"

and Dave Lemon saying the phrase "The Collus is now on Station" was 'win'. Zone Chat regular Flatline said he would re-enact the "DIVE DIVE DIVE!" bit while wearing a lot of red and black paint.

If you want to do that, feel free. Send us in a picture and we might just print it somewhere. And also shake our heads in worry.



HOW TO JOIN IN!

To be a part of next month's ZONE Chat, join our Steam Community group: PC ZONE (PCZ). If you don't have Steam, first be ashamed of yourself, and then download it from steampowered.com. Keep an eye out for announcements in that there Steam group for the date of the next chat event...

Retrozone

Facing the wrong way since 1995...



Flashback

MAFIA

TONIGHT, MATTHEW, I'M going to be a gangster. I'm going to go back to the '30s, when the roads were clear, and I'm going to play the part of a taxi driver who gets caught up in the syndicate of an old-school mob family, then pussies out and decides he wants his family to be safe.

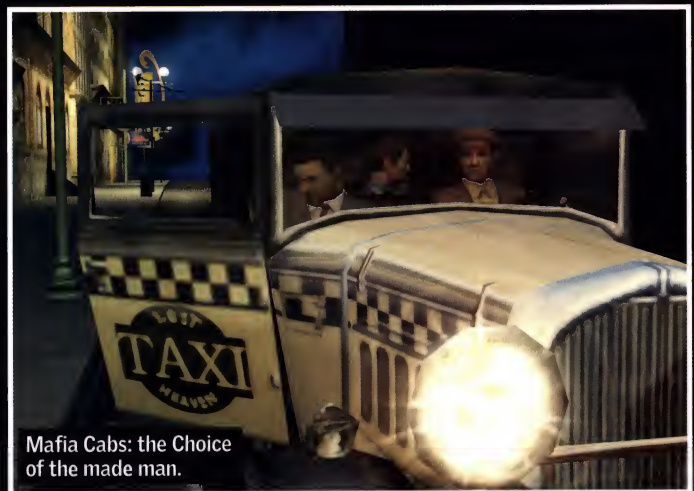
So, we start our story with a chat to a good-old Oirish New Yoik trench coated copper, cutting a deal. The policeman wants us to tell our story – and that's what the game is.

A few things make *Mafia* stand out. The soundtrack is as authentic as any *GTA* game, with Django Reinhardt's jazzy skiddoodles guiding you around the streets. It's less commercial than a cross-promotional set of '80s themed

CDs, but things were less commercial back then. The mini-map only tells you about traffic, if you want to know where you're going, you have to look at a map, which obscures your view. Like it would.

Also, the cars are slow. The opening mission can leave you stumped, until you realise that you can't outrun the other car – you have to nudge it into a pillar, and take advantage of their lousy manoeuvrability. By the time they've three-point turned out of their corner, you'll be well away.

Still, our hero is a good example of a hapless soul, whose road to hell was paved with self-doubt and good intentions. He's not a typical Rockstar ex-con protagonist, he's an example of how good people can be tempted and that makes him more immediately sympathetic. Because none of us here are thieves. Now for information on how to steal this game, see "But how?"



Mafia Cabs: the Choice of the made man.



Slowest car chase ever.

But how? Become a real wiseguy

Mafia isn't available from any of the more obvious digital download stores – GOG, Direct2Drive or Steam. However, you can get it at a price that's less than a fiver away from theft, from third-party resellers on play.com and eBay.

There are issues with with old video drivers, which transform characters into

Silent Hill's Pyramid Head. It doesn't affect the gameplay – in fact, it makes it better. You can get around it by updating drivers.

ebay.co.uk – a popular "auction" site on which people can "sell" "things".

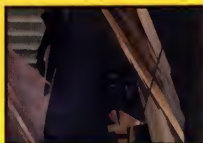
play.com – a shopping website with an unusual amount of goodwill.

First blood The Mafiosa



1 OUR GUY

From taxi driver, to made man, to police snitch trying to take down the entire Family: that's you.



2 EVIL TWIN

This is the polygonal defect that transforms the game into a cross between a *Predator* and *Silent Hill*.



3 DETECTIVE NORMAN

The cop to whom you tell your tale. It's likely his mates call him 'smug dick'.



4 PUNTER

In your early missions, you'll learn that customers hate it when you drive over women. This ain't *GTA*.



5 PAULIE

Paulie keeps saying "This is taking too long." There's no way to say, "This car is from the '20s. Shut it."



6 SALIERI

The bad you'll grass up. You've got a family and he wants you dead. So get the death-boot in first.

Now & Then

WAR FOR CYBERTRON vs BEAST WARS



Transformers.

WHEN PEOPLE TALK of the technological singularity, they mean the time at which humans create a computer intelligence that's more intelligent than humans.

That machine will then be able to create a computer that is more sophisticated than itself, that one will do the same, ad infinitum, and we'll end up living a world of dramatic technological accelerations that'll lead to the *Terminator* movies and, ironically, a cinema full of jock robots watching an Arnie retrospective for the lulz.

Some people think this is inevitable and it's our job to seed that initial Robot Adam with compassionate subroutines. The other option is that robots that turn themselves into cars come to Earth in a transforming planet and have a scrap in any city with skyscrapers, before deciding it'd be cool to turn into spiders and dinosaurs instead. I'm with those guys.



Crappyformers.

Play it! Mighty Morphin Power Stegosauruses

- 1 Look on sites where you might be able to buy *Beast Wars*. When it's not available, convince yourself you've tried as hard as you need to do things legally, and you're justified in stealing it.
- 2 After none of the Abandonware come up with results get angry that you, an entitled user of the internet, can't immediately have something you thought of 10 seconds ago.
- 3 Look at the screenshots on Moby Games, and realise that it doesn't look that good. The spider, for example, is an unconvincing combat device. For starters, spiders are shit at fighting.
- 4 Look at a couple of old reviews, and realise that you've wasted the 20 minutes of your life because someone at *PC ZONE* wanted to wank off about technological singularities.

MAMEframe

R-TYPE

SOME GAMES AGE badly. Some games stay exactly as you remember them. *R-Type* is one of these.

To be fair, that might be because *R-Type* has been re-released so many times since its first arcade inception, our rose-tinteds haven't had a chance to update the graphics.

WHAT IS MAME?

The Multiple Arcade Machine Emulator runs over 3,500 games. You can get it from mamedev.org or from this issue's DVD (we've also got 32 and 64-bit versions of MameUI, which has a nice interface). But downloading games for it is illegal. So don't.

But one thing remains true, playing the original brings out exactly the same emotions that it did the first time around. Intense levels; fun – but comparatively easy – bosses; that third level which is basically a huge warship; the feeling of dread when you picked up an inappropriate power-up; and the why-bother feeling of powerlessness when you died, losing your collection of power-ups.

The grand-daddy of bullet-grazing, pattern memorisation, and joystick punishment, there's a reason *R-Type* remains a money-making brand for anyone on the hand-helds. And that reason is, it's brilliant.

And it really benefits from save states and infinite credits.



R-Type: never stops being fun.

Time Trump

THE WORST OF... ISSUE 149 – XMAS 2004

SIX YEARS AGO, we were all prettier, more loving, and could flip our ankles behind our necks at the drop of a hat. But it wasn't all pickles and candy floss, some of Christmas 2004's games were dogbobs.

MAXIMUM XV ABRAHAM STRONG: SPACE MERCENARY SCORED: 15%

"Put together by a bunch of Polish hobbyists with a penchant for B-grade science and latex" – Anthony Holden

ATHENS 2004 SCORED: 20%

"Woeful in design, execution, and timing. That's a deadly combination" – Paul Presley

FAIR STRIKE SCORED: 28%

"This chopper caper is hovering so close to shit, it might as well be a fly" – Steve O'Hagan

AXIS & ALLIES SCORED: 41%

"You're better off buying some dice, and dusting off a board game" – Steve O'Hagan

CAMGOO SCORED: 45%

"For the first time in *PC ZONE* history, I recommend the PlayStation 2 version" – Will Porter



Space marine vs bugs. Again.



Back In The Day

DEUS EX

DEVELOPER Ion Storm Inc. PUBLISHER Eidos Interactive RELEASED 2000

Will Porter celebrates 10 years of being allowed to wear sunglasses at night

TEN YEARS! TEN whole years! Ten! And still, nothing has bettered it. Sure, there are superior shooters around. In fact, there were better shooters out at the time. But in terms of freedom, and in terms of an otherwise linear game wrapping itself around your actions, only the first few hours of *Vampire: The Masquerade – Bloodlines* has ever come close to matching JC Denton's throne.

However, let's not remember Warren Spector's classic for the spirit of adventure you felt when you first discovered a secret Majestic 12 lair beneath the streets of Hell's Kitchen. Let's not get bogged down by the game ticking a box in Manderley's brain when you went into the ladies lavatory to snoop around for LAMs, cigarettes and

candy bars. Everyone knows about that stuff, obviously.

I mean, sure it was pretty awesome that the game let you kill Anna Navarra as soon as the twist started to roll around – and the way the bravest among us could save our collective brother from the Men in Black – but that doesn't mean every PC gaming website and its sort-of offspring has to bang on about *Deus Ex* all the time.

Instead, let's remember the stuff that was rubbish about *Deus Ex*, yet also every sort of wonderful. The way you could break with the somewhat earnest fiction and behave like a lunatic within its dowdy moon-lit walls.

After all, a mission briefing when you're not squatting on your boss' desk and staring intently at his moustache can pretty much be seen as a wasted one. Otherwise, with a tender misuse of

the save games, you could happily gun down Sandra Renton's father – right in front of her face: "Oh my God. Daddy...", "What a shame."

STACK 'EM HIGH

Better still was the simple joy of piling as much room furniture as you could find on an NPC's desk and listening to them moan about how unprofessional you were being whenever a flying pot plant connected with their head. And how about the ability to lean over someone's shoulder and hack into their email while they sat in their swivel chair twiddling their thumbs?

"Excuse me Gunther, I'm just going to check out your bank details..."

Then again, brilliantly, it was the freedom in moment-to-moment gameplay that not only let you act in

"Every PC gaming website and its sort-of offspring has to bang on about *Deus Ex* all the time"

I said it then, and I say it now, he's *BBI's* Nasty Nick in a trench coat.



Ah, Walton Simons.
The big evil loon.



Government Official: We aren't ready for an introduction yet. No, it's not time... Just keep your nose to the pavement. You will be well rewarded. Trust me.

Consider this a verbal
warning toilet fetishist.



Joseph Manderley: By the way, Denton, stay out of the ladies restroom. That kind of activity embarrasses the agency more than it does you.

"Did you wash your
hands? No? Taste tazer!"

Trooper



Trooper: Okay, come on out.

"Shut up and give
me the GEP Paul."



these days, the wobbly-snipe is more of a bugbear, and the enemy AI is creaky – but the game will still surprise.

PLAY AGAIN...

Take the moment at which I, with a hearty giggle, attacked an MJ12 trooper armed with a flamethrower from the presumed safety of underwater. I certainly wasn't expecting him to whip out a knife and leap in after me.

What's more, if you haven't played it since it first came out you'll be amazed as to how much you've forgotten since your first merry jaunt through futuristic New York, Hong Kong, Paris, and all the mysterious paramilitary facilities in-between.

Take the, frankly brilliant, hostage rescue situation in an abandoned service station that crops up at the tail-end of the game. Coupled with a potential reunion with Sandra Renton outside, if she hadn't died in a pool of innocent blood earlier in the game.

If *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* even comes close to matching the wide-open array of personal tactics that can be used in the original, or how the latter mimics the way that conversations and encounters wrap themselves around former actions, it will be on its way to being a bona fide classic.

Here's hoping, eh? Otherwise that killswitch will be engaged... **PCZ**

"Let's remember the stuff that was rubbish about *Deus Ex*, yet also every sort of wonderful"

a manner unbefitting of a nano-augmented superagent – but also let you experiment with the way you played the game proper.

You could plant a LAM mine underneath an alarm switch, then as soon as you'd nicked a guard with a tranquilliser dart watch him run towards said alarm (saying 'oof' and stopping every now and then) before collapsing into a fiery and explosive sleep when he finally reached his target.

Instead of fighting through a building packed with former allies who suddenly wanted you dead, you could leap off a five-storey roof, smash up your legs and drag yourself to safety.

A tactic that could only work in a game where gingerly pulling yourself towards a vending machine and eating a load of chocolate could miraculously bless you with the ability to walk once more.

PLAY AND...

It's web folklore that every time you mention *Deus Ex* online someone else will feel a sudden compulsion to reinstall it. And in these days of it being a mere £5.99 (less if you catch it in a sale) there's little doubt that one and all should cave into the temptation.

Sure, the nano-upgrades seem to be more of an avenue of progression cul-de-sacs rather than true advancement

Deus Ex Trivia Meaningless factoids collated for your reading pleasure

- Villain Walton Simons was named after one of Warren Spector's friends.
- Initially *Deus Ex* was a conventional spy affair called *Troubleshooter*.
- In the *Deus Ex* time line Los Angeles has been sunk by an earthquake and renamed Arizona Bay, this is a reference to a Bill Hicks stand-up gag.
- The novel *The Man Who Was Thursday: A Nightmare* by GK Chesterton appears throughout the game. Its lead character even apparently is staying at the 'Ton hotel. Its subject matter – a group of Victorians fighting a world-wide conspiracy – struck a chord with the chaps at Ion Storm.
- On paper, before the design process got going, *Deus Ex*'s story was three times longer than it actually turned out.
- The game originally had a section that took place on a moon base, but it was scrapped and the base's interior was used in Area 51.
- JC Denton shares his initials with Jesus Christ. Although few people have spotted this. Also: John Cleese.
- The Twin Towers are missing from the New York skyline. The reason: they were destroyed by terrorists. Very prophetic.
- Warren Spector's dog is called Maggie. Woof!



Man in Black:
Galaxy Defender.

On the PCZ Hard Drive

The games we're playing and why we're playing them



ALPHA PROTOCOL

Spied out: **Jon 'Log' Blyth**

I WISH MAKING games wasn't a business. I wish we'd just make things for the hell of it, and anyone who'd made a game could walk into a bakery and they'd say, "Take a sandwich! And thanks more making life in this cashless world more fun for us bakers!"

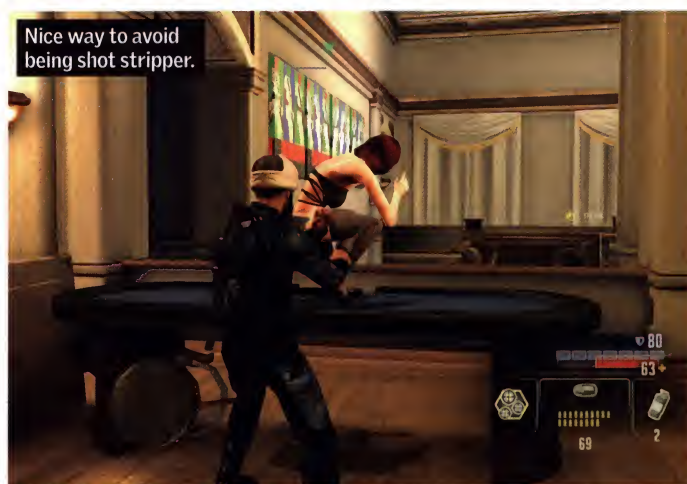
The business aspect is what that leads to humans like Bobby Kotick flourishing. It leads to games like *Singularity* (page 70) slipping under everyone's radar thanks to some pricks in marketing pulling the strings. And it leads to *Alpha Protocol* getting cancelled after an imperfect start.

No-one is going to seriously pretend that *Alpha Protocol* was unfettered brilliance. It had a almost crippling boner for *Mass Effect*, for starters. But what it lacked in satisfying combat, it made up for in semi-realised potential.

For starters, conversation was more realistic. Your chat choices



Nice way to avoid being shot stripper.



"Do you have a wet wipe?"



She packs a big ammo pouch.

didn't migrate into some cosmic pool of karma, and determine whether you're a stellar hero or a space dick. You're a spy, an actor, not a famous paragon of humanity, so your responses only affected your relationship with the person you were talking to. Of course, the drawback of this method was a +1 removed a -1, instead of you having two ever-growing plus and minus banks. But it made you think about what you were saying far more than "press up for nice and down for naughty".

And during that conference

call in the hotel if you're like me, you'll have tried to flirt, because it's worked so far. But both women are listening, and you piss both of them off. That's unusually brilliant.

Of course, you can't talk for too long about the good points of *Alpha Protocol* without acknowledging the bad. So yes the NPCs' AI was a big brown dog's egg with weird strippers hiding from the gunfire by standing on a roulette table in the middle of the room, and bad guys ignoring you as you strolled past. But remember different ways you could tackle the opening levels, and remember how this could have been a great game.

Alpha Protocol could've had a great sequel. Curse this numbers-driven world, and the cash that oils its perverted engine.

VERDICT: Franchise stillborn



Best Beard 2010.

Call social services.

Primary school exams caused Alma to crack.



F.E.A.R. 2: PROJECT ORIGIN

Alamed: **Rick Lane**

I DIDN'T PLAY *FEAR 2* on its release due to widespread complaints of severe console compromises. But after a couple of friends convinced me it really wasn't that bad I decided to give it a chance, and discovered a perfectly worthy sequel to Monolith's classic shooter.

In many ways it's a better game, with vastly better graphics, more

interesting characters and, unlike the original, it was a little bit frightening.

However, my experience of the game was almost ruined by one thing – the shotguns. *FEAR*'s shotgun is one of my favourite FPS weapons. It had a deeply satisfying firing sound and, combined with the game's excellent physics and collision detection, had a definite punch. All Monolith had to do

was place that firearm in *FEAR 2* and I'd have been happy as an England fan complaining about Rooney. Instead they created two new shotguns – one pump-action, one automatic, both dreadful – which made noises like a rabbit's fart, and a less powerful kick than that same long-eared rodent.

Whoever decided to change *FEAR*'s shotgun was an fool and deserves to be

locked in a ball-shaped chamber with a horny undead ultra-powerful psychic teenage girl.

The rubbish new shotguns were indicative of a general loss of identity in *FEAR 2*. It's a great game but, to delve briefly into the realm of cliché, it lacked that special something that made the original so superb.

VERDICT: Shotgunned

SPLINTER CELL: CONVICTION

Deja vued: **Richard Cosgrove**

A RESPECTED VETERAN of PCZ once told me, "*BioShock 2* starts boring, but gets fun four hours in."

As *Conviction* bored me, from the get-go, I decided to follow this wisdom before quitting. But instead of the game becoming fun, I realised why it's dull.

"The original *Splinter Cell* is one of my all-time favourite games," I thought.

"The storytelling's solid. I can live without 50-something Fisher in a cat suit. Mark-and-execute is kinda cool," I thought. "The game makes you think. What's wrong with it? Is it me?"

Then it struck me what was missing from *Conviction*: a crumbling building, a cloak, utility belt and grapple gun for Fisher, and a terrifying and psychotic



clown. I was playing *Arkham Asylum*, minus Batman.

Conviction played exactly the same as *Arkham*, only without the exciting melee, the need to develop a battery of combat and stealth tactics, and imaginative design choices. Even most of Fisher's animations resembled Bats'.

Arkham Asylum wasn't perfect, but the variety of options available at every point, and the twists in the gameplay, kept it interesting. In *Conviction* I felt I was playing on repeat: crouch, sneak, fatality, mark-and-execute, crouch, sneak, fatality, mark-and-execute, crouch, sneak, etc, ad nauseam.

If a developer is going to rip off another game, they should improve on the source material, not worsen it.

VERDICT: Bats-free Batman

WHAT'S ON YOUR HARD DRIVE?

Readers on their chosen poison

TRIALS 2

By Christ I want to smash something. And people complained about the Mako's handling!

g_hughes

CRYSIS: WARHEAD

Going insane on *Steam*. Want more, no money. But I have installed the 64-bit version of *Warhead*. Ooh, it runs well.

Squits

APB (BETA)

I have just finished playing the beta for *APB* (page 74). Not a game for me, but a must for anybody that loved *GTA*.

Daftvader



MASS EFFECT 2

Matthew Pellett talks sci-fi and sequels with Casey Hudson

YOU WON'T BE surprised to hear that Casey Hudson, project lead on *Mass Effect 2*, was incredibly happy with how the game turned out and how much people actually liked it.

He's so effusive about his game, he's willing to talk to anyone who'll listen, be they random people off the

street, or a passing journalist called Matthew Pellett who happened to have a recording device handy.

Touching lightly on such diverse topics as how ammunition works, making *Mass Effect*'s combat system work, how they made Shepherd's armour shiny, Hudson spilled his proverbial guts out at our roving reporter. If you want to know what he said, read on.



Casey Hudson
Project Lead, BioWare

"I told you: it's shirt and tie only!"



01 COMBAT EVOLVED

"*Mass Effect 2* is still a third-person shooter with the ability to give orders to two squad mates. And it still uses the same command interface that pauses the action and allows you to set up your team's tactics, order special attacks and assign positions and targets to your team. What's really different is the overall feel and quality of combat, but that comes from a series of small changes rather than a wholesale, radical redesign.

"When we released *Mass Effect*, we were happy to see that the system itself was really well received. There were lots of requests for improvement in specific areas – like the feel and precision of aiming and movement, the tactical control of your team, and the intensity of combat – so we made a number of minor adjustments to improve each one of those areas.

"The net result is something that plays so much better that it feels like a radical change, and yet people who've played *Mass Effect* will also immediately feel comfortable with how combat works."

Modelled on a real person apparently.

02 FEEDBACK LOOP

"We've a hard-working and passionate team, and it's a huge relief to see that their efforts over several years are so well rewarded. Often the commercial aspect of the business hides the fact that these games are made by individuals who are players and fans themselves, and their work every day is a labour of love.

"Much of what was fun about working on *Mass Effect 2* was seeing how team members add something special to the game, working on their own personal time strictly out of the sheer joy of adding a special experience for players.

"The fish tank for example was something that the game design did not require, but it was made in the evenings by people who thought players would appreciate it."



ME2's version of R2-D2 and C-3PO.

03 PATHS TO GLORY

"We plan out the larger plot points of the story from one game to the next, but it would be impossible to plan it all in advance. More importantly, we'd never be able to plan as many creative opportunities if we'd do it all up front. Instead, we record what a player has done in a play through, and then we have all of those choices available that writers can refer to as they build story lines.

"Many of the connections are made as we're developing new story lines, and we find places where key characters can be ones from a previous story, or where the plot should work differently based on decisions you've made in the past.

"Numerically, it's over 1,000 variables that we'll have access to for shaping the *Mass Effect 3* experience for people who've played the previous games."



Only women get to sex the lizard.

04 ENGINE CORE

"The benefit of hindsight is that we can look at how the *Mass Effect* experience is really meant to work and deconstruct the best examples of it from the first game. The result of that was the discovery of many optimisations that we could make, without making concessions. It sounds counterintuitive, but it comes down to looking at what's actually going on in the game engine, and addressing inefficiencies. Our HUD in *Mass Effect* simply spent more time rendering than it needed to. Rewriting that code resulted in a dramatic improvement in frame rate without sacrificing quality.

"Another example is the material shader quality. In *Mass Effect*, we had really beautiful and complex materials on everything in the scene but, because the lighting model applied a lot of flat ambient light, the materials didn't always look as good as they should. So in *Mass Effect 2*, we made changes to the lighting model so that the material shaders (like the carbon fibre on Shepard's armour) always look their best, even though they don't require more processing than in *Mass Effect*."



It's biotech, not magic.

05 ARE PEE GEE?

"If you define an RPG as a game where you equip your hero by sifting through an inventory of hundreds of miscellaneous items and spend hours fiddling with numerical statistics, then no, *Mass Effect 2* isn't one.

"The best part of role-playing is being the character, and that means never being pulled out of the immersion of the world to be reminded that you're playing a game. So in *Mass Effect 2* we focused on what we love about RPGs: an awesome sense of exploration, intense combat, a deep and non-linear story that's affected by your actions, and rich customisation of your armour, weapons, and appearance. We did those things in ways that achieve what people love about these things in a traditional RPG, but that also preserve the immersion and intensity of the experience.

"We've had an overwhelmingly positive response to this approach, and while we'll make further adjustments to it for *Mass Effect 3*, we're really happy with how it's been received so far."

A Geth good guy.
Potentially maybe.



Revamped combat made for a smoother game.

06 LADY KILLER

"The character that I'm most happy about is Subject Zero, aka Jack.

"Jack worked out perfectly in that she took players through an interesting arc. She was initially seen as a marketing gimmick, and for many people she was repulsive. But we always design our characters with faults and layers of depth, and I knew that when people saw how well our writers had captured her story, they'd really like her.

"In the end, many players have said that they were surprised how much their opinion of her changed as they got to know her, and she's now one of the most popular squad members."

Jack: the best
ME2 character?



What happened next?

07 CLIPPING ISSUES

"One of the most controversial things was probably the change to how ammo works, from an unlimited ammo system in *Mass Effect* to one where you pick up clips.

"This was something that wasn't part of the main game design, but instead was simply implemented as a test by a gameplay programmer. Our lead designer was against the idea, but tested the 'ammo' version of the game for several weeks in total secrecy before concluding that it made a huge improvement to the tension and pacing of combat.

"Some of the best ideas in *Mass Effect 2* happened that way, where a passionate member of the team took their own time to try something they thought would be great, and it eventually passed harsh scrutiny to become part of the game's experience."

"Jack took players through an interesting arc"



Martin Sheen's looking good.

08 PLAN OF ATTACK

"We've had the very high-level concept of the trilogy mapped out from the start, but we approach each game as a new and standalone title. We wanted to make sure that players new to the series can jump right in to the beginning of *Mass Effect 2*, and that everyone will get a satisfying and climactic endgame even though there's still one more part to the trilogy.

"The high-level concept really just gets us a start and end point, with a few basic structural ideas. From there, we listened to the feedback from fans and reviewers, and combined it with our own creative ideas to form a clear vision for what *Mass Effect 2* should be. It's at that point that we decided to make the story about preparing a team for a suicide mission, as a means of tying even the most sentimental side plots into your epic mission.

"It's a top-down process where the story outline is really the last thing to be done, after we have the larger structural aspects of the game in place."

STEVE HILL'S

NEVERQUEST

Steve Hill waves his wand in *Runes Of Magic*...



THERE'S NO SUCH thing as magic and I'm not entirely sure what a rune is. I do, however, know what tits are, and in predictably juvenile fashion I've given my Human Female Rogue an absolutely enormous pair, maxing out the sliders for both chest and breasts (which seems a tad superfluous). It looks depraved, and in the name of common decency I rein them in to a manageable size. Anyway, with an arse like mine, nobody's going to be looking at my rack.

I am, it's fair to say, something of an eyeful, entering this world in little more than thigh length boots and underwear. Apparently, "Rogues are a disquieting sort, known for their troublesome and mysterious activities, not to mention the wide variety of unsavoury methods for which they have become infamous..." Sold.

I may be dressed for S&M, but a dog in a pair of Biggles goggles has

other ideas, sending me on a mundane quest to kill spiders.

I show off by doing it on horseback, and the obligatory drudgery earns me a pair of gardening trousers, which unfortunately obscures my arse.

TIGER FEET

Bored of killing wolves and harvesting fungi, I strike up a chat with a ginger-haired bloke called Lisian.

"Hi", I say, "Would you like to slaughter wildlife with me?"

"No," he replies, "I'm completing quests, I have account with high level."

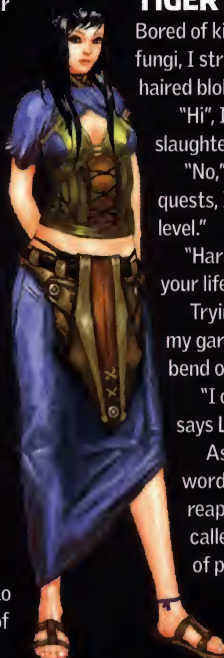
"Hark at it," I say. "I didn't ask for your life story."

Trying a different tack, I remove my gardening trousers and casually bend over.

"I can help you with my knight," says Lisian, immediately.

Asking me to wait, true to his word, five minutes later he reappears as a level 37 knight called Ripeck, astride some kind of preposterous black tiger.

"I can help you with killing mobs, ok?" he insists, before barking orders at me as if in some kind of blood lust. Prancing around on his ridiculous tiger, he thinks he's the cock of the roost with his elaborate mount,



but I have a trick up my sleeve. In the modern equivalent of '70s music journalists receiving illicit packages with their review vinyl, I redeem a special key that gives me an array of magic potions, as well as something called a Mammoth Mount.

Clicking on the latter, it turns out to actually be a mammoth, dwarfing his paltry tiger as I splay my arse cheeks across the enormous saddle. Sneering down at him, I ask, "What's that little thing you're riding?"

YOU'VE GOT MALE

Unfortunately, the beast is simply too unwieldy to be any practical use, so I dismount and lead my knight to the killing fields. He follows by a short distance, and although I check my run a couple of times, he stays behind me, almost as if he's staring at my bum.

Finally instructed to kill animals on my behalf, Ripeck sets off on a rampage, leaving me to simply stroll around and pick up the spoils, the experience made



more absurd by the fact that collecting each item makes a sound like receiving email in a '90s film.

Bending Ripeck to my every whim, it's a fast track to success as the knight does all the donkey work, while I coquettishly pout and offer him a few words of encouragement.

English is not his first language, but nevertheless our relationship comes to an abrupt end when he announces, "Ohh no my mutter sry but I must go bye." What his mutter found him doing, one can only guess at.

"Attention everyone, Jenna Miller is a slut," warns Archanjo, apropos of nothing. **PCZ**



PCZONE

Future Publishing Ltd

2 Balcombe Street, London, NW1 6NW
Tel 020 7042 4720 Fax 020 7042 4729
Email letters@pczone.co.uk
Website pczone.co.uk

MAFIA

Acting Editor Jon Hicks
Acting Associate Editor Tamsin Oxford
Hardware Editor Phil Wand
Staff Writer David Brown
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Deputy Art Editor James Roff
Contributors Nick Brakespear, Jon 'Log' Blyth, Mike Channel, Steve Hill, David James, Jeremy Laird, Rick Lane, and Will Porter.
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Group Finance Director John Bowman
Tel +44 (0)20 7042 4000 (London)
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Website pczone.co.uk

Email letters@pczone.co.uk

Post PC ZONE, Future Publishing,
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Here at **PC ZONE**, we're fully behind the output of German sim-factories. We believe the next stage of human evolution will take place in an underground data vault, where humans are compressed to 3MB of data. And in our Virtual

Sim worlds, we won't all get to fly amazing aeroplanes, or experience the still-misunderstood condition known only as Cakemania. When we migrate up a couple of dimensions to escape the fires that are purging the surface of life, our

theoretical counterparts are going to need jobs. So, when the end comes on the second of September 2010, you can thank us for saving you from an eternity of carefree living on the hyper-dole.



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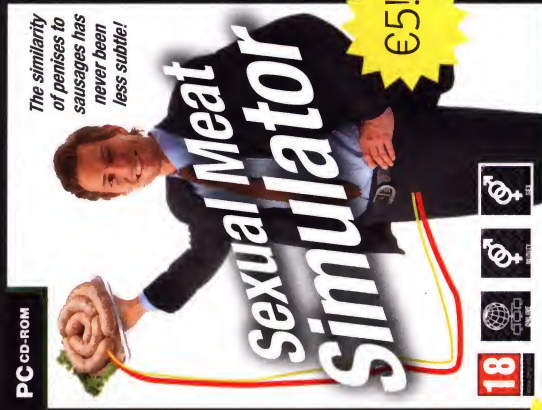
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